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Enemies, partners or friends? Employers' perspectives on conflict management by employee representatives in Europe.

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Summary

Enemies, partners or friends? Employers' perspectives on conflict management by employee representatives in Europe.

Ana Belén García

Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Lourdes Munduate and Prof. Dr. Martin Euwema; Co-supervisor: Dr. Patricia Elgoibar

In organizations, a constructive dialogue between management and representatives of employees is essential to come to optimal decision making, prevent escalation of conflicts, and find integrative solutions for problems in the organization, related to the interests of employees. This social dialogue is in many countries, and especially within the European Union institutionalized. Elected and protected employee representatives (ERs), engage in social dialogue with management. This relation however is often conflictive. In this dissertation, we aim to gain a deeper understanding on the conflicts and conflict behaviors of ERs, particularly as perceived by their counterpart in the organization, being HR managers. This subject is understudied, however of great interest, both from academic and societal point of view. First, we developed a heuristic model for this dissertation (chapter 1), defining our key variables. We focus on perceived competences of ERs, in relation to task- and relationship conflicts between management and ERs, conflict behavior by ERs, and the perceived influence of ERs on decision making, as well as on the quality of this decision making. We did so through four different studies.

Our first study is a systematic literature review on conflict and conflict behavior by ERs at organizational level related to the trust between the parties. We found only a very limited number of empirical studies, and particularly few quantitative studies, investigating these relations in this context. Our second, third and fourth studies are based on a large multi-national survey. This was conducted in 11 EC member states, with 614 HR-managers participating.

Study two investigates the relations between perceived competences of ERs, their cooperative and competitive conflict behavior, and the perceived influence on decision making on traditional and innovative issues. Based on theories of competences, conflict behavior and influence, we tested our model, demonstrating that perceived competences are positively related with influence on both types of issues. This relation is partly mediated by conflict behavior. The theory of conglomerate conflict behavior is supported, with cooperative and competitive behavior contributing positively to perceived influence.

Study three investigates the relations between task and relationship conflict, conflict behavior and the quality of agreements. We tested hypotheses based on theories of team conflicts and conglomerate conflict behavior. We conclude that task and relationship conflict are both negatively related to quality of agreements, and that this is partly mediated by conflict behavior. In addition, the study shows that a) both types of conflict are positively related with competitive behavior, and negatively with cooperative behavior; and b) both types of behavior are positive related to quality of agreements.

Study four takes a broader approach on the position of ERs in Europe. We elaborate perceptions of management on ERs, analyze differences between countries, and propose possible interventions to improve social dialogue.

In our concluding chapter, we summarize our findings, and discuss theoretical and practical implications.

Samenvatting

Vijanden, partners of vrienden? Percepties van werkgevers van conflictgedrag van vertegenwoordigers van werknemers.

Ana Belén García

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Binnen organisaties is een constructieve dialoog van management en vertegenwoordigers van werknemers (hier verder ERs; employee representatives) essentieel om tot een optimale en gedragen besluitvorming rond organisatievragen te komen en conflictescalatie te voorkomen. Deze sociale dialoog is in veel landen, zeker binnen de Europese Unie, geïnstitutionaliseerd. ERs worden door werknemers verkozen en hebben doorgaans een beschermde status. Dit mede omdat de relatie tussen management en ERs conflictgevoelig is.

Deze dissertatie heeft tot doel om conflicten en conflictgedrag van ERs te onderzoeken. In het bijzonder vanuit het perspectief van de wederpartij in de organisatie, HR-managers. Hoewel van groot maatschappelijk en wetenschappelijk belang, is heeft dit onderwerp tot heden weinig aandacht gekregen in de internationale literatuur. We ontwikkelen eerst een heuristisch model (hoofdstuk 1), waarbij ook de kernvariabelen worden gedefinieerd. We richten de focus op de waargenomen competenties van ERs, en gaan de relatie na met conflicten tussen management en ERs, conflict gedrag van ERs en hun invloed op besluitvorming en de kwaliteit van deze besluiten.

Onze eerste studie (hoofdstuk 2) betreft een systematische review van de literatuur over ons onderwerp. Dit levert een zeer beperkt aantal empirische artikelen op, wat nogmaals het belang van ons onderzoek illustreert. De overige studies zijn gebaseerd op een vragenlijst onderzoek in 11 lidstaten van de EU, waar in totaal 614 HR-managers aan deelnamen, en op persoonlijke interviews met 110 van hen.

Studie twee (hoofdstuk 3) onderzoekt de relaties van waargenomen competenties van ERs, conflict gedrag, en de invloed op besluitvorming over zowel traditionele als innovatieve kwesties. We testen hypothesen, gebaseerd op theorieën over competenties, conflict gedrag en invloed. Competenties blijken positief gerelateerd aan invloed op beide typen kwesties. De relatie wordt deels gemedieerd door conflict gedrag. Dit ondersteunt de theorie van conglomeraat conflict gedrag.

Studie drie (hoofdstuk 4) test de relaties tussen taak- en relationeel conflict, conflict gedrag van ERs en kwaliteit van besluitvorming. We testen hypothesen gebaseerd op de theorie van team conflict en van conglomeraat conflict gedrag. Zowel taak als relationeel conflict zijn negatief gerelateerd aan kwaliteit van besluitvorming, waarbij het verband met taakconflict sterker is. Deze relaties worden deels gemedieerd door conflictgedrag. Beide typen gedrag zijn positief gerelateerd aan kwaliteit van besluitvorming.

Studie vier (hoofdstuk 5) geeft een breder perspectief van de positie van ERs in Europa. We presenteren percepties van management in de verschillende landen en voorstellen voor verbetering van de sociale dialoog.

In ons afsluitend hoofdstuk worden de bevindingen samengevat, breder gekaderd en besproken we theoretische en praktische implicaties.

Resumen

¿Enemigos, compañeros o amigos? Perspectivas de la patronal sobre la gestión de conflictos de los representantes de los trabajadores en Europa.

Ana Belén García

Directores: Prof. Dr. Lourdes Munduate y Prof. Dr. Martin Euwema; Co-director: Dr. Patricia Elgoibar

Un diálogo constructivo entre la patronal y los representantes de los trabajadores (RTs) es clave para alcanzar una óptima toma de decisiones, prevenir el escalamiento de los conflictos, y encontrar soluciones integradoras para los problemas de la organización. Este diálogo social se encuentra ya institucionalizado en muchos países, especialmente en la Unión Europea.

Esta tesis pretende comprender mejor los conflictos y comportamientos de gestión del conflicto de los RTs, particularmente desde la perspectiva de los directores de Recursos Humanos (RRHH), sus homólogos en la mesa de negociación.

En primer lugar, desarrollamos un modelo heurístico (capítulo 1), definiendo nuestras variables de estudio. Nos centramos así en las competencias percibidas por la patronal de los RTs en relación a: a) los conflictos de tarea y relacionales; b) el comportamiento en el conflicto; c) la influencia en la toma de decisiones; y d) la calidad del proceso de toma de decisiones.

Para cumplir dichos objetivos llevamos a cabo 5 estudios.

El primer estudio (capítulo 2) consiste en una revisión sistemática de la literatura sobre los conflictos y el comportamiento en el conflicto por parte de los RTs, a nivel organizacional, en relación con la confianza entre las partes. El segundo (capítulo 3), tercer (capítulo 4) y cuarto estudio (capítulo 5) son empíricos y se basan en datos cuantitativos recogidos de 614 directores de RRHH en 11 países Europeos. En el capítulo final (capítulo 6), resumimos nuestros hallazgos y discutimos las implicaciones teóricas y prácticas.

El segundo estudio (capítulo 3) analiza las relaciones entre las competencias percibidas de los RTs, su comportamiento de gestión del conflicto (cooperativo y competitivo), y la influencia percibida en el proceso de toma de decisiones tanto en cuestiones de tipo tradicional como innovadoras. El estudio tres (capítulo 4) investiga las relaciones entre el conflicto de tarea y relacional el comportamiento de gestión de conflicto y la calidad de los acuerdos. El estudio cuatro (capítulo 5) adopta un enfoque más amplio sobre la posición de los RTs en Europa; en dicho capítulo profundizamos sobre las percepciones de los RTs por parte de la patronal analizando las diferencias más significativas entre los países participantes. Finalmente, concluimos este estudio con posibles intervenciones para la mejora del diálogo social en la mesa de negociación.

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Chapter 1. General Introduction

1.1 Setting the scene

April 2017, we could read in the news that Ryanair staff at Alicante–Elche airport are set to go on strike after disputes of unpaid wages to part time staff.¹ The staff have called for a four-day strike starting on Good Friday and ending on Easter Monday after it was alleged some part-time staff are owed up to €1,000 by the low-cost airline. The strike could cause havoc during such a popular travel period.

Conflicts between employees and management such as with Ryanair in Spain, are daily news, all over Europe. With often serious consequences for different parties, such as the company, the workers and the society – for instance, the many travelers in this case. The case at Ryanair staff in Spain going on strike, is usually the end of a long going dispute, escalating over time. The parties involved have not been willing or not been able to negotiate in constructive ways to solve their issues, and deal with the conflicts of interest which often are underneath the surface of the dispute. Often, this process ends up in a strike, where distributive tactics are used by both parties, with usually high costs for all parties involved. With escalating conflict, the tensions grow and trust between management and workers vanishes quickly. In the example of Ryanair, a trust-breaking event happened: the employees claim that promises towards part-time working colleagues has been broken by management. Under these circumstances, management and employee representatives are the two parties at the negotiation table in charge of managing the conflict.

In this doctoral dissertation, we focus on the role these representatives play in conflict management in the organization. We will refer to them as ‘employee representatives’, from now on, ERs. What can ERs do to gain influence in organizational decision making, promote the interests of workers, and prevent conflict escalation? What is effective negotiation behavior, and how can they reach qualitative agreements?

These questions are particularly important in times of change. The case of Ryanair is just one example, where we see huge changes in the transport industries worldwide, with great implications for working conditions of the employees. If ERs don’t have influence on the decision making in organizations, the interests of the employees most likely will hardly be considered. The financial interests of the organization might prevail. Gaining influence in the negotiations will therefore prevent future conflicts and escalations. In Europe is a strong tradition of negotiations between management and labor, also at organizational level. And to prevail, the quality of such negotiated agreements is crucial. Both for the organization to survive, as for the employees to maintain their positions with favorable conditions (Koukiadaki, Tavora & Martínez-Lucio, 2016; Turnbull, 2010).

This dissertation focuses on the way ERs manage conflicts in organizations. To gain a deeper understanding of this behavior by ERs, we explore three related questions. First, we conduct a systematic review, describing the academic empirical studies that have been conducted on conflict management with a focus on ERs. Secondly, we

¹ Retrieved from: <http://www.theolivepress.es/spain-news/2017/04/13/ryanair-staff-spain-set-go-strike-easter/>

explore in a large study among European managers, how ERs are perceived by management when it comes to their influence in organizational decision making, and how conflict behavior by ERs is related to this influence. A third study focuses on the quality of negotiated agreements. Here we investigate the relation between type of conflict, and the perception of the quality of agreements the parties negotiate. In this study, we also examine the mediating role of conflict behavior by ERs. Our fourth study takes a broader perspective, exploring the perceptions by management of a wider range of competences of ERs, the relationship, and good practices and ways to improve social dialogue. In this introduction, we first elaborate more on the context of our studies, we present a heuristic model for this thesis and introduce our key variables as well as the structure of this thesis.

1.2 Conflict management: key in the social dialogue in organizations

This dissertation focuses on conflict management in organizations. And particularly we focus on the role of ERs in this conflict management, how they interact, negotiate, fight and solve problems with management, on behalf of their co-workers. To understand the role of ERs and their dynamics with management, we first discuss here the context of ERs, particularly in Europe.

Collective conflicts are part of organizational dynamics, where the interests of management and employees are not aligned (Lewicki, Elgoibar, & Euwema, 2016). To manage these conflicts, many societies provide systems of organized dialogue between management and employees. Often, this dialogue is between management and delegations of workers: ERs (Markey, Ravenswood, Webber & Knudsen, 2013; Markey & Townsend, 2013; Wilkinson, Gollan, Marchington, & Lewin, 2010). This so called social dialogue usually aims for a fairer division of power within the organization (Summers & Hyman, 2005). Depending on legislations and organizational practices, this social dialogue impacts a broad range of decisions (Knudsen, 1995), including health and safety issues, diversity and inclusion policies (Arenas, DiMarco, Munduate, & Euwema, 2017), as well as downsizing and restructuring (Van den Berg, Grift, & Van Witteloostuijn, 2011; Van der Brempt, 2014).

One of the institutionalized forms of indirect participation is often referred to as social dialogue. Social dialogue is defined as: “discussions, consultations, negotiations, and joint actions involving organizations representing the two sides of industry, both employers and workers. It is a process by which relevant parties seek to resolve employment-related differences via an information exchange” (Bryson, Forth & George, 2012, p. 5). Social dialogue as a formal platform for consultation and participation in decision-making has a long tradition, particularly in Europe. The European Commission (EC) promotes a constructive social dialogue between employers and employees. According to the EC, the problem-solving potential of this dialogue is crucial for solving organizational conflicts (European Commission, 2013). For this reason, the EC promotes works councils, as platform for social dialogue in organizations.

The European Union legislation requires a works council in organizations with 50 or more employees. Employees of the organization elect their representatives for this

works council. ERs are typically elected for a period of four years and have a protected position (Stegmaier, 2012). ERs are normally employed in the organization and have a part-time or full-time role representing their co-workers in negotiations, different types of organizational conflicts, and decision-making processes with management (Conchon, 2013a, 2013b; Munduate, Euwema, & Elgoibar, 2012; Euwema, Munduate, Elgoibar, Pender, & García, 2015). The works council meets with top management to discuss issues relevant for employees in the organization. Typically, the HR director plays a key role in these meetings representing management. The HR director or manager typically represents the employer in negotiations with unions and ERs, such as WCs, and is in charge of negotiating all labor related issues. Their experiences and perceptions impact the climate and dialogue substantially. The extent to which works councils are informed, consulted, and have influence, varies substantially between countries, sectors, and organizations². For that reason, HR managers are the focal group in this dissertation.

The regulations towards works councils, elections and the rights of ERs differ between EU member states (Conchon, 2013b; Pulignano, Martinez-Lucio, & Whittall, 2012). However, ERs have under European law, as well as under national laws, quite some decisive power when it comes to vital issues in the organization, varying from health and safety, to mergers and acquisitions (Euwema et al., 2015). Nevertheless, it is less clear what the actual influence of ERs is on the decision-making. In a recent German study, Mueller and Stegmaier (2017) show that works councils on longer term contribute to organizational performance.

Globalization processes lead towards decentralization of bargaining from national or sectorial to company level, increasing the adaptation of the working conditions (e.g. wages) to local conditions (Addisson, 2005; Marginson, 2015; Visser, 2010). Therefore, currently in many countries the company level social dialogue is the level with more and more impact for both employers and employees (Euwema et al, 2015). As a clear example, the French president Macron, elected in May 2017, makes a strong point of his policies to let individual companies negotiate wages, rather than being subject to industrywide agreements³.

An important feature of this system is, that ERs are not only agents for their colleagues, however also employees of the organization. And often representing only specific groups of the workers. The counterparts at the table, typically, the HR director, or other senior management, also are employed by the same company. And therefore, the different parties at the table also share common interests. These representatives from employees and management need to relate to one another to achieve satisfactory agreements for all parties (Tjosvold et al, 2016). Just like any other group, management and ERs have the need to work together to execute their tasks. By sharing and discussing work floor information, managers and ERs may solve work floor grievances,

² See for an overview of differences in legal positions and influence of works councils in Europe: <https://www.cesifo-group.de/ifoHome/facts/DICE/Labour-Market/Labour-Market/Unions-Wage-Bargaining-Labour-Relations/DR-2015-4-oesingmann-Workplace-representation-Europe/fileBinary/DR-2015-4-oesingmann-Workplace-representation-Europe.pdf>

³ Retrieved from: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-05-23/macron-tackles-france-s-labor-code-in-first-domestic-policy-push>

leading to a more productive and committed workforce (Tjosvold, Wan & Tan, 2016). However, due to the underlying nature of the mixed-motive setting, management and ERs are sometimes reluctant to do so, because they fear exploitation by an opportunistic partner.

Relationships between ERs and employers differ as well as its power balance, some being characterized by trust and cooperation and others, in contrast, are antagonistic and conflictive, fighting for each one's positions and being inflexible in their negotiations (Fells & Prowse, 2016). In the best of cases, works councils show cooperative relations between both represented sides -management and employees- in a context of mutual trust (Elgoibar et al, 2016). In contrast, the daily news presents us with less positive examples of relations between management and workers. Relations can be strictly formal, information exchange limited, and works councils isolated from management or serving as a 'control tool' for management (Nienhueser, 2009).

The involvement of ERs in decision making processes differs globally, and within Europe. Northern countries in Europe are usually characterized by a high involvement of social partners in industrial policy (Van Gyes, 2010). Southern countries, on the other hand, demonstrate very low degrees of involvement of social partners (Shire et al., 2009). Central and eastern European countries show a mixed scenario, with some countries (such as Estonia and Romania) involving social partners in the process and achieving strong industrial policy initiatives, while in others (Czech Republic, Bulgaria, and Slovakia) social partners show little engagement (EU Social dialogue liaison forum, 2014). History, societal, legal and sectorial structures and cultures all determine how this social dialogue is taking place in action. As in all social relations, the perceptions of management and ERs of each other, determine the quality of their interaction. For that reason, focus on the perceptions management has of ERs by management, is important to study. Central in this PhD is the perception of one of the parties: the employers' view on ERs in the social dialogue, their competences, conflict behavior and influence on organizational decision making. This is an understudied area in industrial relations, as well as in the conflict management literature. With this PhD, we aim to fill this lacuna in academic research and to provide relevant theoretical as well as practical implications.

1.3 Objectives and relevance of this dissertation

Objectives

The overall objective of this dissertation is to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of employers on antecedents and consequences, as well as conflict behavior by employee representatives (ERs). More specifically, we aim to achieve following goals:

- a) Gain an overview of current studies on conflict behavior by ERs in collective conflicts in organizations, as well as antecedents and consequences of such behaviors;
- b) Understand the perception of European HR-managers, as representatives of employers, of key antecedents and consequences and conflict behaviors of ERs;

- c) Test different relations between antecedents, conflict behavior by ERs, and consequences.
- d) Contribute to improve the quality of social dialogue in organizations.

In the next paragraph, we will elaborate the heuristic model of this PhD with the specific variables in the dissertation, particularly competences, conflicts, conflict behaviors, influence and quality of decision making.

Relevance of the dissertation

This dissertation is of relevance in our opinion both for academic reasons, as well as for societal and professional reasons.

Academic. We see the academic relevance of this PhD first of all, in the exploration of a domain, hardly covered by research nor by theory. That is, what are perceptions of HR managers on their counterparts at the ‘social dialogue table’. With this focus, we aim to bridge two important academic fields: industrial relations and conflict management, which have to offer each other a lot, however remain too often separated (Euwema & Munduate, 2015). Secondly, the variables under study, have not received much attention. Gaining insight both at descriptive level, as well as gaining insights on the relations between antecedents, conflict behaviors and consequences, is new to the field of industrial relations.

Societal. As we wrote already before, collective conflicts in organizations have a major impact on all involved. When not managed effectively, the consequences can be dramatic, for employees, for the organizations, as well as for the society at large. Therefore, gaining a deeper understanding of what drives conflict behaviors by ERs and how to contribute to quality of decision making, is important for societies. This might be particularly relevant for member states of the EC, however we believe these processes are also relevant for other societies, where different systems of representation are at place.

Professional. Within Europe, as well as in many other societies, social dialogue in organizations is key for organizational democracy, sustainable relations, productivity and innovation. To that extent, there are many people permanently engaged in different forms of dialogue. With this study, we hope to contribute to the professional qualities of those at the table. We hope outcomes of our studies can find a way to training institutions for HR managers and ERs.

1.4 Heuristic model of the PhD

Figure 1.1 presents the heuristic model of this PhD. This model is based on the more extensive New European Industrial Relations (NEIRE) model (Euwema, García, Munduate, Elgoibar, & Pender, 2015). Starting at the outcomes in our heuristic model, we focus on two variables: the *quality of agreements*, reached in negotiations between management and ERs, and the *influence* ERs have *on decision making* in organizations. We furthermore focus on three variables which partly determine these outcomes: the

competences of ERs, the amount and type of *conflicts* between management and ERs, and key to our model is the *conflict behavior by ERs*, which is also related to ER's competences and the type of conflicts with management. This is a dynamic process, where the outcomes often feed perceptions of competences, new conflicts and conflict behaviors. The feedback loop (arrows at the bottom of Figure 1.1), indicates this. These dynamic processes are embedded in a cultural *context* of industrial relations. Next, we discuss shortly the key variables and relations presented.

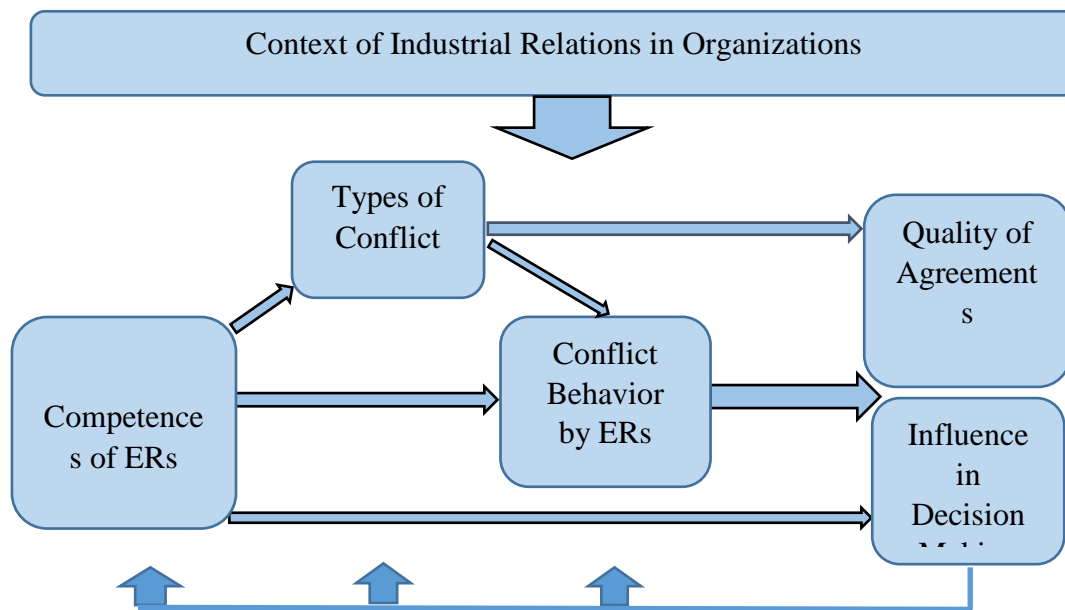


Figure 1.1. Heuristic model of the key variables in the dissertation

Context of industrial relations

At the top, we see the *context of industrial relations*. This context determines the other focal points in our studies: the prevalence of conflicts between management and ERs, the competences and conflict behavior of ERs, and the quality of negotiated agreements, as well as the influence of ERs on organizational decision making in a broader sense. Labor law, as well as structures at national, sectorial and local level, determine which parties meet, what subjects are negotiated at which tables, and who can be representatives of the parties involved. Also, cultures, national, sectorial and organizational, impact this context. Within the EC, there is specific European law relevant for social dialogue at different levels. Also, European works councils have been institutionalized within the EC, and gain importance (Conchon & Triangle, 2017). Who will be recruited and elected as ERs is often part of culture, in unions as well as locally. And also on management side, culture plays a role. Not only in whom will be at the table, but also the scripts for negotiations and conflict management are culturally bound, reflected in the behavior of parties (Brett, 2007; Poole, 2013). The context also determines the features of social dialogue in the organization (Gilliland, Gross & Hogler, 2014; Pulignano, Martinez-Lucio, & Whittall, 2012). A key characteristic that we consider of this context is the level of trust between employers and ERs (Elgoibar, Munduate & Euwema, 2016). Trust at different levels, varying from society and sector,

to organization and works council. When studying the context of social dialogue, we therefore also take into account the trust between social partners, in our literature review (chapter two). Trust is closely related to a more cooperative climate in organizations, which impacts conflicts and conflict behavior in these organizations (Medina, Munduate & Guerra, 2008).

Quality of negotiated agreements

Management and ERs meet, discuss and negotiate over a large variety of issues. The quality of decision making, resulting in negotiated agreements, can be measured in terms of outcomes for the individual parties, as well as for the joint outcomes. Negotiation outcomes are usually defined in terms of reaching optimal solutions, where all parties maximize their outcome, and realize a mutual satisfactory result, to which both parties are committed (Lax & Sebenius, 1992; Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993; Sebenius, 2015). This also can be applied for negotiations such as collective labor agreements in organizations, arrangements for health and safety in the workplace, decisions related to restructuring or downsizing, or the implementation of more sustainable production methods and policies. Here, decisions made, preferably meet the interests of the different stakeholders, which typically require innovative and tailor made solutions. In this dissertation, we consider the quality of agreements an outcome of the process of consultations, dialogue and negotiations, between management and ERs in organizations.

Influence of ERs

Works councils typically have the right for information and consultation, and sometimes co-determination. Particularly in Germany the right for co-determination is strong (Shire, Schönauer, Valverde & Mottweiler, 2009). In such cases, the consent of the works council is a mandatory requirement for undertaking particular measures. In most EC member states, such enforceable co-determination is however non-existent.⁴ French and Raven (1959) defined influence as a force one person exerts on someone else to induce a change in behaviours, attitudes, and values. So, in the European context, the influence ERs have on decision making, is understood as their ability to change management behaviors, attitudes and values on different issues, will vary, depending on the legal rights, on the issues at stake, and certainly also on the relations between ERs and management. In this dissertation, we differentiate between influence in traditional issues; topics which have been on the table for a longer time, and are more rooted in legislation, such as working conditions, working hours, and wages (Guest, 2016), as well as the organization of jobs (Van der Brempt, 2014; Van der Brempt, Boone, van Witteloostuijn & van den Berg, 2017). Other issues have developed more recently and are therefore referred to as innovative issues. These often are less evident to discuss, and putting these on the agenda might depend more on the relationship between management and ERs. For example, when relations are cooperative, management might

⁴ For an overview see: [https://uk.practicallaw.thomsonreuters.com/9-503-2690?transitionType=Default&contextData=\(sc.Default\)&firstPage=true&bhcp=1](https://uk.practicallaw.thomsonreuters.com/9-503-2690?transitionType=Default&contextData=(sc.Default)&firstPage=true&bhcp=1)

be more open for initiatives to discuss employee-related issues such as inclusive HR, sustainability issues, or training and support, referred here as innovative issues (Van Gyes, 2010).

Coming back to our heuristic model, we investigate the relation of these two outcomes with *competences* and the *conflict behavior* of ERs, and we analyze if the type and frequency of *conflicts* between management and ERs will have an impact on these outcomes.

Competences by ERs

The role of ER is considered generally as challenging and stressful (Elgoibar, 2013; Munduate et al, 2012), requiring a large variety of competences. The notion of competence is defined as the capacity to adequately perform a task, duty or role in the context of a professional work setting. Thus, a competence is understood to integrate knowledge, skills, personal values and attitudes, and to be acquired through work experience and learning by doing (Bartram & Roe, 2008). In the same direction, Spencer and Spencer (1993, p. 9) define competence as: “the underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to criterion-referenced effective and/or superior performance in a job situation”. So, what characteristics determine the effectiveness of ERs? Soares and Passos (2012) describe different qualities to perform adequately the role of ERs which are seen as key competences for this role. Munduate et al (2012) developed a measure to assess such competences for ERs, these include both ‘hard skills’, such as knowledge about labor law and business finance, and ‘soft skills’, such as competences to communicate, negotiate, and manage conflict. In this dissertation, we focus on ERs’ competences as perceived by management.

Types of conflicts between ERs and management

Conflict is daily business in most organizations. Conflicts between the interests of departments, teams, and between the interests of management and employees. Social conflict has been defined in many ways. In this dissertation, we use the definition by Van de Vliert, Euwema and Huismans (1995) who consider a conflict between two or more parties, when at least one of these parties is frustrated or annoyed by the other party. Conflict management is the response to this experience, per the same authors. Social dialogue is designed to signal such conflicts in early stage, or even prevent conflicts. Within this social dialogue however, also conflicts can occur between ERs and management. We use in this dissertation the well-known, and extensively studied, differentiation between task and relationship conflicts (Benitez, Medina, & Munduate, 2012; Guerra, Martinez, Munduate, & Medina, 2005; Jehn, 1995; Medina, Munduate, Dorado, Martínez, & Guerra, 2005). Task, or cognitive, conflict is defined as the perception of disagreements about the content of the decisions and involves differences in viewpoints, ideas, and opinions (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Examples of task conflict between management and ERs are conflict about distribution of resources, about procedures and policies, and interpretation of facts (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). Relationship conflict is defined as the perception of interpersonal incompatibilities and

typically includes issues of personal preferences, values, and interpersonal style (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003).

Conflict behavior by ERs

Conflict behavior can be defined as “a parties’ reaction to the perceptions that one’s own and other party’s current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously” (Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994, p. 20). We classify conflict behavior as cooperative or competitive. *Cooperative* behaviors are those in which a party considers the interests of the other party in relation to the conflict issues. *Competitive* behaviors on the other hand refer to parties striving toward their own goals and interests, on the expense of the other party (Carnevale & Pruitt, 1992).

Walton and McKersie (1994) acknowledged that in industrial relations, competitive and cooperative behaviors both have their merits. In their work, they emphasize the importance of combining both behaviors. This is since most negotiations in this context are complex and multi-issue, with integrative potential requiring cooperative and creative problem solving behavior, as well as with distributive elements also requiring competitive behavior (Euwema et al., 2015; Sebenius, 2015; Van de Vliert et al., 1995). Therefore, in this dissertation we focus on the combination of cooperative and competitive conflict behaviors. This combination of conflict behaviors is the essence of the theory of conglomerate conflict behavior, or CCB (Munduate, Ganaza, Peiro, & Euwema, 1999; Van de Vliert et al., 1995).

1.5 Structure of this PhD

To gain a deeper understanding of the research problem, we investigated the presented relations in three different ways. First, we conduct a systematic literature review, focusing particularly on the relations between context, conflict and conflict management, trust and outcomes of these dynamics, presented in chapter 2 of this manuscript. Next, we develop an empirical study among HR managers, where we focus on the relation between perceived competences, conflict behavior of ERs, and influence of ERs on organizational decision making. This study is presented in chapter 3 of this manuscript. Our next empirical study investigates the relation between types of conflict, conflict behavior of ERs, and the quality of negotiated agreements. This study is presented in chapter 4 of this manuscript.

In chapter 5 we present the results of a broader analysis of perceptions by management on competences and attitudes of ERs, and the relations with management. Also, we take a closer look at differences between the 11 countries in the study, as these have rather different cultures when it comes to industrial relations, as well as different legal positions. In chapter 6 we discuss the overall results of our studies, and present implications both for theory, and for practice.

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Chapter 2. Trust and Conflict Management in Industrial Relations⁵

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The aim of this chapter is to explore the role of trust and management in Industrial Relations (IR) within organizations. First, we offer a short review of trust and conflict management from different theoretical perspectives. Secondly, this chapter offers an overview of key empirical studies on trust and conflict management in the specific context of industrial relations. We summarize findings relevant for the different partners and set an agenda for future research.

2.1 Introduction: trust and conflict management

The autumn of 2014 was dramatic for Air France-KLM; one of Europe's largest airlines, was the protagonist of the longest airlines' strike since 1998.

After the announcement from Air France-KLM of their intention to cut out 800 positions and carry on other supplementary savings in order to better resist the wild competition from the Gulf's low cost companies, the Air France pilots reacted going on a strike which lasted two weeks. This resulted in an estimated loss of over €500 million, which together with the already poor financial results that book year, was enough to wipe more than a fifth off its estimated full-year core profit (Mediapart, 2014).

Trust from co-workers in the company's management politics was already very weak, and this last announcement resulted in further uncertainty and destruction of an already damaged relation between management of Air France and their employees. The conflict management of the French pilots was said to be competitive, aiming to win on the expense of the company; however, despite continued deadlock with managers over the development of the firm's low-cost operations, pilots suspended the strike when the final decision was not taken.

A break down on trust, at all levels, resulted from these negotiations which ended up with unfulfilled expectations over the table of Air France. Also, tensions between different groups of employees (pilots, crew and ground staff), and between Air France and KLM increased. This case shows the strong interconnection between competitive conflict management (in the form of forceful reorganizations, strikes, and power play between the parties) in a context with already original low levels of trust, and the resulting further break downs of an already stressed social climate.

Could these industrial relations have been more constructive? We believe indeed, this was possible. Let's go back a few years, and across the channel, to the UK, for a second case⁶.

Employment relations at 'PCT' -a primary care NHS trust in the UK- were anything but friendly. Conflicts of interest were dealt within an adversarial and confrontational manner. As one union representative put it: "It was 'them and us', batter the barricades the old-fashioned way. If there was a problem, just hit it head on". Union-management relations were characterized by mistrust and suspicion and, in consequence, issues were directly dealt with through formal channels. Furthermore, when these formal grievance and disciplinary hearings took place, they were conducted in an adversarial manner.

This was the scenario before Saundry and colleagues in 2008 implemented training in mediation for both HR managers and union representatives. The focus of this training was on shifting attitudes, bringing issues out, and encouraging an open and informal dialogue. A union representative explained that this acknowledged the fact that they do have issues and promoted trust development between both parties. The development of trusting relationships between the HR professionals and trade union representatives involved in the mediation scheme shaped attitudes to conflict and fostered a much clearer focus on resolution as opposed to confrontation. This attitude also passed on to other employees, as they observed and learnt from behaviors of key actors, who represented them and who they trusted. Even union recruitment saw a positive impact due probably to an improvement of the image of unions, now seen as collaborative and effective.

The case study at PCT is an example of how investing in constructive attitudes to foster high-trust relations and particularly to encourage a more co-operative approach to conflicts pays off in many ways, such as an improvement in the company's ability to resolve disputes or higher and better union recruitment.

The limited availability of resources for organizations (Carley & Marginson, 2010) together with tendencies towards deregulation, more flexible labor arrangements and individualized contracts (so called ideals), has placed labor negotiations more at the

⁶ Example based on the case study by Saundry, McArdle & Thomas (2013).

organizational level, certainly in Europe (Glassner, Keune & Marginson, 2011). More conflictive issues are now at the table of works councils and other bodies of employee representation, such as health and safety committees. The attitudes and abilities of both parties when managing conflicts, combined with the conflict strategies they implement, will determine in practice the quality of the agreements they will reach and therefore the improvements for both workers and organizations (Elgoibar, 2013; European Commission, 2012; Visser, 2010).

That being the case, a review on what has been researched on trust and conflict behaviors by the different parties at the table, is essential to understand the decision-making processes that will lead to labor agreements in the short future. We start with defining the key concepts, and present the limited research afterwards.

Defining trust: the long-term perspective

Industrial relations traditionally have developed on a basis of fundamental conflict and adversarial relationships between parties. The history of industrial relations is full of the struggle for workers' rights, and during the industrial revolution, relations were typically not based on trust (Van der Brempt, 2014). Also, today, we see in many societies and organizations opposition against unionization of employees, and even hostile relations between unions and organizations. Furthermore, the challenges of the current global market create a hostile environment in which distrust is as likely to be created as trust (Lewicki, McAllister & Bies, 1998; Lewicki, Elgoibar & Euwema, 2016). Trust within industrial relations, trust between employers and employees, therefore is not evident. However, at the same time, employers trust employees to work in their organizations, and vice versa. Many companies recognize the vital importance of good relations, and the investment in developing such relations (Euwema et al., 2015). On the other hand, unions emphasize the need of cooperation and trusting relations with employers (Munduate et al., 2012). There evidently is also a base for trust between these social partners, and for organizations to exist, cooperation is essential.

Some definitions of trust emphasize expectations, predictability, and confidence in others' behavior (Dasgupta, 1988; McAllister, 1995; Sitkin & Roth, 1993). Yet other definitions emphasize that trust involves expectations of other's benevolent motives in situations that involve a conflict between self and collective interests (Holmes &

Rempel, 1989; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt & Camerer 1998). A generally accepted meaning of trust is the inclusion of vulnerability that involves acting in anticipation of positive behaviors of the other party in the future. In this sense trust is commonly defined as a belief (or expectation) about others' benevolent motives during a social interaction (Boon & Holmes, 1991; Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Hosmer, 1995; Rempel, Holmes & Zanna, 1985; Rousseau et al., 1998).

Trust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another" (Rousseau et al., 1998, p. 395).

Lewicki and colleagues (1998) point out that trust should be differentiated from distrust (Lewicki, Elgoibar & Euwema, 2016). Trust concerning positive expectations of the other party and distrust concerning negative expectations from the other party.

Social Exchange Theory (SET) serves as a framework for exploring this relationship to understand how trust, loyalty and mutual commitment are evolved over time (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The SET framework is primarily concerned with the factors that mediate the formation, maintenance, and breakdown of exchange relationships and the dynamics within them. Trust plays an important role in this framework. Both Blau (1964)⁷ and Holmes (1981) identified trust as a key outcome of favorable social exchanges (see more in Munduate, Euwema & Elgoibar, 2017). When relationships conform to the norms of reciprocity and when the pattern of exchange is perceived as being fair, parties are more likely to believe that they will not be exploited (Blau, 1964). Trust is proposed to be important in relationship development because it allows parties to be less calculative and to see longer-term outcomes (Scanzoni, 1979). Put another way, through trust a party is able to expect fairness and justice in the long-term and therefore does not have to demand it immediately.

⁷ "The establishment of exchange relations involves making investments that constitute commitment to the other party. Since social exchange requires trusting others to reciprocate, the initial problem is to prove oneself trustworthy" (Blau, 1964, p. 98).

Defining conflict and conflict management

Conflict is a component of interpersonal interactions, neither inevitable nor innately bad, however commonplace (Deutsch & Coleman, 2006; Schellenberg, 1996). Conflict in the context of industrial relations is often approached as an intergroup conflict: capital versus labor, employers versus employees. Also at the organizational level, 'management' versus 'workers' has been a classic distinction. However, managers nowadays usually also are employees of the company. And management and employees together might line up against 'capital', for example in cases of multinational companies intending to close local branches. So, more blurred lines occur. Works councils are in many countries composed of both, employer and employee representatives (from now on referred to as "ERs"), which defines the classic labor-management conflicts now as a special form of intragroup or intra-organizational conflict, instead of inter-group conflict (Van den Brempt, 2014). In organizations, management and ERs meet in different bodies. Here, the factional group paradigm might be helpful. Factional groups are defined by Li and Hambrick (2005, p. 794) as: "groups in which members are representatives, or delegates, from a small number of (often just two) social entities and are aware of, and find salience in, their delegate status". The intergroup conflicts in the organization are thus represented at an intragroup level, in bodies such as the works council.

Social conflict has been defined in many ways. In this chapter, we use the definition by Van de Vliert, Euwema and Huisman (1995) who consider a conflict between two or more parties, when at least one of these parties is frustrated or annoyed by the other party. Conflict management is the response to this experience, per the same authors. Comparably, conflict behavior is often defined as one parties' reaction to the perception that one's own and the other party's current aspiration cannot be achieved simultaneously (Deutsch, 1973; Pruitt, 1981; Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994). It is both what people experiencing conflict intend to do, as well as what they do (De Dreu, Evers, Beersma, Kluwer, & Nauta, 2001; Van de Vliert, 1997). Conflict management encompasses the cognitive, emotional and behavioral responses in conflict situations. In the context of industrial relations at organizational level, parties typically meet to negotiate. However, this can include all kinds of different responses, varying from highly competitive, to highly cooperative. In the next paragraph, we elaborate three

theories on conflict management, before exploring the specific studies from our literature review in the context of industrial relations.

Conflict management theories

Several theories have addressed conflict management and conflict behavior. We discuss here shortly three of the most relevant theories, which are: the theory of cooperation–competition (Deutsch, 1973), the Dual-Concern model (Blake & Mouton, 1964), and the Conglomerate Conflict Behavior theory (Van de Vliert, Euwema, & Huismans, 1995).

Theory of Cooperation and Competition

Deutsch' classic theory of competition and cooperation proved useful analyzing conflict in many contexts, including management and employees, and identifying constructive ways to managing it (Deutsch, 2002; Elgoibar, 2013; Tjosvold & Chia, 1989). This well verified theory of the antecedents and consequences of cooperation and competition hardly had been used to study industrial relations in organizations, however allows insights into what can gives rise to constructive or destructive conflict processes, also in employment relations (Elgoibar, 2013; Munduate, Euwema & Elgoibar, 2012). The core of the theory is based on the perceived interdependence of parties. Positive interdependence promotes openness, cooperative relations, and integrative problem solving. Perceived negative interdependence on the other hand, induces more distance, less openness, and promotes competitive behavior, resulting in distributive bargaining (Tjosvold, Wong & Feng Chen, 2014).

Dual-Concern Model

Among the most popular and broadly validated classifications of conflict behaviors is the dual-concern model (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Pruitt & Rubin, 1986; Rahim, 1983; Thomas, 1992; Van de Vliert, 1999). The model implies that the way in which parties handle conflicts can be described, and is determined by two concerns: concern for self (own interests) and concern for others (relational interests). These two concerns define usually five different conflict management strategies: forcing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising and problem solving (De Dreu et al., 2001).

This model is used both as a contingency model: describing under what condition what conflict management strategy is used best (Van de Vliert et al., 1995); however also as a normative model: promoting the idea that “integrating or problem solving ” is the most effective strategy to manage conflicts , particularly for joined outcomes and long term relations (see more in Tjosvold, Tang and Wan, chapter 4 in this volume; De Dreu et al., 2001; Tjosvold, Wong & Feng Chen, 2014) .

Conglomerate Conflict Behavior theory

In industrial relations and in negotiations more generally, integrative solutions not necessarily imply also a strong impact on the decision making by both parties. Particularly when it comes to negotiations and decision making on conflictive issues between management and employees, competitive actions sometimes are needed to achieve a power balance. This was already recognized by Walton and McKersie (1994) and developed in the theory of Conglomerate Conflict Behavior (CCB) (Van de Vliert, Euwema and Huisman, 1995)

Tjosvold, Morishima, and Belsheim (1999), define forcing and problem solving strategies as opposed. Other authors (Thompson & Nadler, 2000) argue that parties in a conflict, in order to achieve their own outcomes and reach mutual agreements at the same time, try to combine both types of conflict behaviors (cooperative and competitive) (Elgoibar, 2013). This is the basic assumption of the Conglomerate Conflict Behavior Theory (Van de Vliert, Euwema, & Huismans, 1995; Munduate, Ganaza, Peiró & Euwema, 1999). This theory states that most conflicts and negotiation situations are complex and mixed motive. Therefore, the combination of different conflict management strategies is most common, and can be beneficial. Strategies, being either cooperation and competition, or forcing, avoiding and problem solving, are combined sequentially or simultaneously, or both. Several studies have demonstrated that competing behaviors (such as forcing), and cooperative behaviors (such as problem solving) do not necessarily exclude one another, however the combination of strategies contributes to effective outcomes (Euwema, Van de Vliert & Bakker, 2003; Euwema & Van Emmerik, 2007; Komorita & Parks, 1995; Munduate et al., 1999; Sheldon & Fishbach, 2011). Most of these studies were conducted in organizational conflicts, however not related to industrial relations, including worker representatives and management.

2.2. Trust and conflict management in the context of industrial relations: a review

Trust and conflict management have received a lot of attention in the academic literature during the past 20 years, particularly in the field of organizational behavior. Surprisingly however, the organizational behavior studies focus on direct relations within organizations, while industrial relations typically focus more on trust and conflict between employers and unions. In this search, we focus on the organizational level, and see what empirical studies one side, and worker representatives on the other. We conducted a systematic literature review⁸.

We reviewed the literature of the past 20 years. The criteria for inclusion of papers were published in peer reviewed journals and papers referring to the organizational level. We included in our search both qualitative and quantitative studies. We found in total 11 papers addressing trust, 5 papers addressing conflict management, and 14 papers addressing both topics simultaneously. The studies using quantitative data are summarized in Table 2.1.. The studies analyzing qualitative data are summarized directly in the text.

Table 2.1. *Overview of the studies found in the systematic literature review*

⁸ We searched Psychinfo, Business Source Premium and Web of Science. We searched for papers reporting studies that clearly aimed to investigate the different roles of trust between partners in industrial relations (e.g. managers, union representatives, employee representatives, union negotiators...) conflict management, conflict behaviors and grievance resolution. We used the following search terms for the systematic review: industrial relations, organizational level / organizations, trust, conflict management, bargaining, indirect participation, employee representative, union representative, shop steward and works councils. In addition, we used a snowballing method to find relevant publications, and included academic publications in books, and dissertations.

Author and year of publication	Topic	Sample	Findings
<i>Trust in Industrial Relations</i>			
Bartram, Stanton, & Elovaris (2008)	Trust as a motive for becoming a representative.	Members of the Australian Nursing Federation (n=1020)	-Union commitment and low trust in the employer were positively associated with becoming a representative.
Guest, Brown, Peccei & Huxley (2008)	Does partnership at work increase trust?	Union representatives (n=656) and non-union representatives (n=238) in Great Britain	-There is no association between representative participation and trust. -Lower employee trust in management where there is representative participation. -Direct participation is associated with higher trust.
Holland, Cooper, Pyman & Teicher (2012)	Relationship between employee voice arrangements and employees' trust in Management.	Australian employees (n=1,022)	-Employee trust in employers increased with a more direct voice. -Where employees perceived that management attitudes were opposed to unions, trust in management was likely to be lower. -Union voice was associated with lower trust in management.
Kerkhof, Winder & Klandermans (2003)	Instrumental and relational determinants of trust in management among members of works councils.	108 works councils in The Netherlands	-Works council members who think that the council is influential or effective, and those who think that decision-making procedures are fair and that they are respected, report more trust in management. -Over time, the only predictor of trust in management is procedural justice.

Nichols, Danford & Tasiran (2009)	The relation between tenure and employee trust in management.	3,037 British employees	-Association between unions in workplaces and low trust in management.
Nienhueser & Hossfeld (2011)	The effects of trust on the preferences for decentralized bargaining.	Personnel managers (n= 1,000) and works councilors (n= 1,000) in Germany	-Mutual trust doesn't affect the managers' preference for decentralized bargaining. -Mutual trust is positive related to the preference for decentralized bargaining and for bargaining at the plant level for the WCs.
Yoon-Ho, Dong-One & Ali (2015)	Effects of trustworthiness on the adoption of high performance work systems.	1,353 ERs and managers in Korea	-Mutual ability, benevolence and integrity had a positive relationship with the adoption of high performance work systems.
<i>Conflict Management in Industrial Relations</i>			
Bacon & Blyton (1999)	Implications of co-operation and conflict for employees and trade unions.	ERs in the UK	-The study didn't find evidence of any association revealed between cooperation and a greater role for trade unions. -Workplace co-operation (in the steel industry) remains part of a traditional gainsharing package and an 'alliance of insiders' than an HRM partnership or union incorporation. -The study's results suggest questioning the ability of cooperation to deliver important aspects of organizational competitive advantage.

Bacon & Blyton (2007)	Conflict for mutual gains? Negotiation patterns of union negotiators.	21 departments across two integrated steelworks	<p>-Managers secured lower manning and increased productivity in negotiations both in departments characterized by cooperation and by conflict.</p> <p>-Mutual gains were secured only where union negotiators pursued conflict tactics during bargaining.</p> <p>-When union negotiators adopted more conflictual bargaining tactics, more employees reported pay increases and greater satisfaction with team working agreements 'Mixed' bargaining approaches in other departments were less successful.</p>
Elgoibar (2013)	Conflict behavior of ERs' in Europe	2,304 European ERs	<p>-ERs use conflict patterns rather than single behaviors.</p> <p>-Spanish ERs use mostly competitive patterns while Belgium, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands use mostly cooperative patterns.</p> <p>-ERs' commitment to the company and to the union affects perceptions of cooperative management differently in Spain than in Germany.</p> <p>-Perceived social support is negatively related to accommodating behavior for female ERs in Spain but not in The Netherlands.</p>
Tjosvold, Morishima & Belsheim (1999)	Complaint handling on the shop floor: cooperative relationships and open-minded strategies.	Supervisors and union employees-in British Columbia.	-Cooperative goals, compared to competitive and independent, promote open-minded discussions of complaints that result in efficient resolutions benefiting both parties.
Tjosvold & Morishima (1999)	Grievance resolution: perceived goal interdependence and interaction patterns.	Management & union representatives	<p>-Cooperative goals promote the direct, open-minded consideration of opposing views which leads to quality solutions efficiently developed</p> <p>-Need to structure cooperative interdependence and guide skill training in grievance handling.</p>

<i>Trust & Conflict Management in Industrial Relations</i>			
Elgoibar, Munduate, & Medina, & Euwema (2013)	Trust in management, union support and conflict behavior in ERs in Spain.	719 Spanish representatives	<p>-Representatives use mostly a competitive conflict pattern in Spain combined with cooperative behavior-Trust is negatively related to competitive conflict management.</p> <p>-Union support is positively related to competitive behavior by ERs.</p>
Euwema, Munduate, Elgoibar, García & Pender (2015).	Managers' perceptions of conflict management and trustworthiness of ERs, and trust between both.	614 European managers	<p>-Cross-cultural differences among European ERs trustworthiness, conflict management and trust perceived by the management.</p> <p>-Competitive conflict management by ERs is related to more influence on traditional issues; while cooperative conflict management is related to more influence on innovative issues.</p> <p>-Trust between ERs and management, and ERs' cooperative conflict management are related to more satisfactory agreements</p> <p>- ERs' abilities perceived by the management are positively related to their influence on decision making, however not integrity neither benevolence.</p> <p>-Industrial relations climate of trust is strongly related to cooperative conflict management style, however not related to competitive conflict management by ERs.</p>
Van der Brempt (2014)	Opening the black box of works council effectiveness: the role of group composition, trust and perceived influence.	Management and ERs in a works council setting in Belgium.	<p>-Cooperation between social partners is promoted if there is less difference in ideological characteristics.</p> <p>- Procedural justice and perceived organizational support may positively affect trust within works councils.</p> <p>- As the distance in ideology increases, ERs' trust in management and group effectiveness decreases.</p> <p>- Distance in education does not have a negative impact on trust in management or works council effectiveness.</p>

2.3 Trust in the context of industrial relations

The empirical literature on trust in the context of industrial relations is surprisingly thin and are mostly case studies. We describe shortly the papers presented in Table 1. Bartram, Stanton and Elovär (2008) used a sample of Australian nurses to study how trust in management and union commitment affected the likelihood of becoming an ER, amongst other relationships. They found that low trust in the employers' good will made it more likely for employees to become representatives. Union commitment was also found to be positively related to the likelihood of becoming an ER.

Guest, Brown, Peccei and Huxley (2008) explored in the UK if partnership at work led to increased trust at different levels of the organization. The results indicated that representative participation was not associated to any of the measures of trust. Employees reported lower trust when these types of representation were present compared to the organizations in which they were absent. Direct participation however did relate positively to higher levels of trust.

Holland, Cooper, Pyman and Teicher (2012) used Social Exchange Theory to examine the relationship between direct and union voice arrangements, perceived managerial opposition to unions and employees' trust in management. Using cross-sectional data from a sample of Australian employees. They found a positive relationship between direct voice and employees' trust in management. They also found that union voice and perceived managerial opposition to unions were negatively related to employees' trust in management.

Kerkhof, Winder, and Klandermans' longitudinal study (2003) explored the antecedents of trust in management among works council members in The Netherlands. ERs were more likely to trust managers who provided them with fair treatment, whereas providing them with influence in the decision-making processes was deemed less important.

Nichols, Danford and Tasiran (2009) analyzed the data from the British 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey to see what factors affected trust in management. Following their expectations, they found that employee trust in management deteriorates with greater length of service (that is, years of workplace exposure).

Trust was seen as an antecedent of preference for decentralized bargaining in a study by Nienhueser and Hossfeld (2011) among 1000 personnel managers and work councilors in Germany. They found no effect of trust from the management's perspective. However, for works council members mutual trust had positive effects on the preference for decentralized bargaining and for bargaining at the plant level.

Yoon-Ho, Dong-One and Ali (2015) collected surveys from 1.353 Korean labor representatives and managers to examine whether mutual trustworthiness - ability, integrity, and benevolence- between employee representatives and management is an important antecedent for the adoption of high performance work systems (HPWS). The results indicated that all three components of mutual trustworthiness had a positive relationship with the adoption of HPWS.

In addition, Timming carried out two qualitative studies in this topic. In the first one (Timming, 2006) he addressed trust in a European work councils and found that trust relations were characteristically sub-optimal both between worker and employers' representatives and among the workers themselves. The second case study explores the dynamics of cross-national trust relations between workers' representatives, finding a low level of trust between the two delegations of workers –one in the UK and one in The Netherlands- of the case (Timming, 2009).

2.4 Conflict management in the context of industrial relations

Conflict in the context of industrial relations in organizations can be related to a variety of issues. As we observe in the studies found, these issues include: reaching agreements, the compliance to agreements, negotiating working hours or policies on inclusion. Handling complaints that the agreements on working hours are not respected by management, or grievances about injustice in the workplace, are however also classic conflictive issues related to formal industrial relations in the organization (Gordon & Miller, 1984; Euwema et al., 2015).

Bacon and Blyton (1999) surveyed British union representatives to explore the different outcomes resulting from cooperative vs. competitive industrial relations. They found that cooperative relations were related to some positive outcomes for employees, such as better conditions and involvement. However, they didn't find a link with other HRM aspects nor with a greater role of trade unions.

Bacon and Blyton (2007) studied among twenty-one departments (across two integrated steelworks) conflict for mutual gains and negotiation patterns of union negotiators. They concluded that when union negotiators adopted more conflictual bargaining tactics, more employees reported pay increases and greater satisfaction with team working agreements. 'Mixed' bargaining approaches used in other departments resulted to be less successful. Another key finding was that managers secured lower staffing and increased productivity in negotiations both in departments characterized by cooperation and by conflict. Mutual gains were secured only where union negotiators pursued conflict tactics during bargaining.

A recent study (Elgoibar, 2013) among 2,304 European ERs explored the antecedents and conflict behaviors of European ERs. ERs use conflict patterns rather than single behaviors, supporting the CCB theory (Van de Vliert et al, 1995). More specifically, in Spain ERs use mostly competitive patterns while Belgium, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands's ERs use more cooperative patterns. ERs' commitment to the company and to the union showed to affect cooperative conflict management differently depending on the industrial relations system, this was showed in a comparison between Spain and Germany.

Based on the theory of cooperation and competition, Tjosvold Morishima and Belsheim (1999) explored whether cooperative goals promote open-minded negotiations between employees and supervisors, which in turn lead to better resolutions for both parties. To do so they carried out interviews with supervisors and union employees in British Columbia. The hypotheses were supported and the authors concluded that cooperation and open-minded negotiation skills can facilitate integrative solutions to workplace conflicts. The study by Tjosvold and Morishima (1999) on grievance's resolution between management and union representatives concluded, that cooperative goals promote direct, open-minded consideration of opposing views which leads to quality solutions. Cooperative goals also induced an open-minded discussion of diverse views resulting in high-quality and integrative solutions. When management and ERs perceive competitive goals, this leads to close-minded interactions, defaulting efficient agreements. This study signaled the need to structure cooperative interdependence and guide skill training in grievance handling.

Regarding qualitative studies, Cutcher-Gershenfeld (2011) studied escalated collective labor conflicts, through a case study method where more than 300 negotiators

were involved in negotiations on how to bargain, and first reach agreement on this to overcome intractable conflicts. This study focused on the importance of being able to differentiate between intractable and manageable conflicts.

Lewin, Keefe and Kochan (2012) also carried out a qualitative study, in this case to focus on what makes dispute resolution procedures work. Based on process and outcome assessments, they argue that public sector labor and management best use mutual gains negotiations. Dennison, Drummond, and Hobgood (1997) studied collaborative bargaining in two public universities through the follow up of the development of interest-based bargaining. Process and outcomes were assessed. In doing so they adopted a process which enabled them jointly to: identify the issues, analyze the interests underlying those issues, develop options reflecting those interests, evolve the means of assessing the options, and finally articulate outcomes deemed efficient, legitimate, mutually acceptable, supportive of collaboration, and worthy of joint commitment.

2.5. Studies addressing both conflict management and trust

The number of quantitative studies addressing the relationships between different levels of trust and conflict management in the context of industrial dialogue appear to be scarce. Elgoibar, Munduate, Medina and Euwema (2013) used the Spanish industrial relations context for exploring the conflict pattern from worker representatives and the relation to trust in management and union support. Surveys among 719 representatives showed that Spanish representatives use mostly a competitive conflict pattern combined with a cooperative behavior, and that the low level of trust in management is related to a greater use of the competitive behavior. Additionally, the high level of union support in Spain seems to stimulate competitive conflict behavior.

Focusing this time on the perceptions of employers, Euwema, Munduate, Elgoibar, García and Pender (2015) surveyed more than 600 European managers and interviewed 110 managers from 11 EC member states on their perceptions of the role, attitudes and competencies of ERs. They found that trust between managers and ERs is strongly related to a cooperative conflict management style by ERS, however not related with competitive conflict management. Additionally, the results showed that high level of trust between ERs and management together with ERs' cooperative conflict management were two factors related to the achievement of better agreements.

Furthermore, competitive conflict management by ERs was related to more influence on traditional collective bargaining issues, while cooperative conflict management was related to more influence on innovative issues.

Van der Brempt (2014) used both qualitative and quantitative data with the aim of shedding light on the demographic and contextual antecedents of works council effectiveness at the team-level. A multiple case study of six Belgian works councils led to the development of a comprehensive framework of cooperation between management and ERs in a works council setting. Consequently, this framework was tested through two empirical studies using a dataset of 640 Belgian works councils. The results showed that procedural justice and perceived organizational support may positively affect trust within works councils and in doing so, it reduces the negative impact of factional distance in ideology on trust and cooperation. Additionally, it was found that as the distance in ideology between managers and employees in WCs increases, ERs' trust in management decreases, and so does group effectiveness. This negative relationship is moderated by the organizational and industrial context of the works council.

Several authors used case studies to understand the role of trust and conflict management in labor relations. Butler, Glover, and Tregaskis (2011) explored the resilience of partnerships in companies which were downsizing. Trust moderates the relation between influence of trade unions, competitive strategies and the stability of the partnership. Trust was high at local level; however, it was the limited trust at national level that hindered negotiations. Multilevel trust therefore is important to achieve a constructive negotiation climate.

Caverley, Cunningham and Mitchell (2006) analyzed how the degree of trust affects an integrative collective bargaining process in two Canadian public sector cases. They conclude that the level of trust was based on previous negotiations and the expertise and negotiation style of the negotiators.

Danford and colleagues (2014) assessed the efficacy of partnership in the context of 'expert labor' sectors through three case studies analyzing the cooperative relationship between union representatives and management, the influence of unions in these settings, and the attitudes of coworkers towards these cooperative attitudes. The study finds that in all three cases the union is seen by its members as a weak, insubordinate entity in terms of collective influence over management policy. In the two

organizations characterized by high-trust and cooperation, they saw partnership to be more effective for individual member representation than for collective influence.

Ericsson, Augustinsson and Pettersson (2014) interviewed 78 Swedish managers and blue- and white-collar workers to find out how they managed the financial crisis. One of the conclusions from this study was that trust between employer and employee was an important ingredient in creating the conditions for loyalty and for reaching integrative agreements.

The labor-management partnership cases of Borg Warner and British Airways were reviewed by Evans, Harvey and Turnbull (2012) to examine whether cooperation, mutual trust and mutual gains can be achieved in partnership contexts in the UK. The authors analyzed why neither of the cases resulted in mutual gains. They stated that the lack of manager support of union membership in both cases led to low trust of employees in management, which made satisfaction with the outcomes almost impossible.

Garaudel, Florent and Schmidt (2008) explored two French restructuring cases using Walton and McKersie's theoretical framework and providing evidence of the potential of integrative bargaining in restructuring. They argue that any restructuring situation, even in an unfavourable context displays an integrative potential, in that employers' and employees' risks are closely interrelated and these risks can be successfully addressed in a cooperative way.

In line with this, Miller, Farmer, Miller, and Peters (2010) show the benefits of interest based bargaining in a US case. This study showed the success of 2000 interest-based contract negotiations, however not free of future challenges to this approach to negotiation. Among the key factors enhancing this achievement were an effective coordination in a complex environment, deadline pressure, good management of internal negotiations, investment in training, effective leadership accompanied by facilitation, as well as creative brainstorming and a solid establishment of ground rules, and the role of interest-based processes in an organization's daily routine.

Korshak (1995) studied how to create labor-management cultural change during labor negotiations for twelve different companies which were heavily unionized and had a history of confrontational labor relations. Among the key learnings was that a shared

vision of labor relations makes it easier to accomplish the common goal of creating a better relationship with the workers and unions. Moreover, it became key to avoid creating a bureaucracy that would turn that movement for cultural change into an entity seeking only to perpetuate itself and the status quo. Trusting and empowering the principal players over agents, helped to establish a constructive conflict culture.

McKersie, Eaton and Kochan (2004) examined a case of an agreement based on interest-based negotiations (IBN) in the company Kaiser Permanente. In their first case study, they analyzed what enabled effectiveness of a complex labor-management negotiation. McKersie and colleagues (2008) also carried out a case study regarding IBN based on the 2005 national contract negotiations between Kaiser Permanente and the Coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions. They found that IBN techniques were used more and were effective when the parties shared interests, however when they were in greater conflict they would tend to use more traditional positional bargaining. High levels of trust facilitated using IBN, but tensions between the parties first had to be released before any type of tactic, IBN or traditional, could be effective.

2.6. Conclusions and future research

Summarizing our literature search, we come to eight conclusions.

1. There is a lack of empirical, and particularly quantitative studies relating trust and conflict management between management and ERs in organizations. Also, the complexities in this context, such as typically multiparty, multi issue, representative negotiations, are rarely addressed in these studies.
2. Looking at the outcome of the studies on trust, we can conclude that trust has deserved more attention, than distrust. All studies underscore the relevance of trust to develop constructive relations, also in the context of industrial relations in the organization. Less is clear what types of trust and what interventions contributing to the development of trust. Rebuilding trust after industrial relations conflicts has received very little attention so far (see Lewicki et al., chapter 6 in this volume). Several studies emphasize to focus on trust as a multilevel issue, particularly in large companies.

3. The conglomerate conflict behavior model offers a good perspective to analyze conflict behavior in industrial relations agents, as this model emphasizes the combination of different conflict management strategies in complex conflict situations.

4. There is a lack of descriptive studies at the level of trust and conflict management strategies by ERs in Europe, as well as worldwide. It is important to assess these levels, as both parties at the table tend to use stereotypes of the trust, trustworthiness and conflict behaviors. These stereotypes usually are negative, and reinforce competitive patterns, depending on the context.

5. Future studies should integrate trust and conflict management by both sides at the table in sound empirical studies to gain a better understanding of the conflict dynamics, and related outcomes, both in the short and long terms.

6. The proposition based on our review is that organizations investing in a trusting relation with ERs, empowering these representatives in decision making, and introducing models of constructive controversy, will have more constructive conflict management, reach more integrative and innovative agreements, which results in long term effectiveness of the organization.

7. Investing in a culture of constructive controversy for industrial relations gives a foundation to manage crisis, and search for integrative potential even in threatening conditions. This requires the empowerment and inclusion of principal parties, in addition to agents (representatives).

8. Trust and constructive conflict management go hand in hand. Accepting the dual realities of trust and distrust, cooperation and competition offers the best base to develop long term constructive relations in organizations.

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Chapter 3. Competent or Competitive? How Employee Representatives gain influence in organizational decision- making⁹

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3.1 Introduction

“In our company, we have a works council of 11 employee representatives. They are entitled to involvement in decisions on strategic issues, but they usually don’t fully understand the issues and tend to respond in a defensive manner. However, when they are supportive towards our plans, it will certainly help implementation. Therefore, my dilemma really is: to what extent and at what moment should I involve them?” (HR director of a large financial institution in Belgium).

This quote addresses the core issues of this article. Employee Representatives (ERs) can play a crucial role in organizational decision-making. However, to gain influence they need to be taken seriously by management. The HR director in the above example needs ERs as competent partners, who are willing to cooperate; otherwise, they are at risk of being marginalized and minimally involved in decision-making. Thus, the implementation of the decisions may be jeopardized. ERs are agents on behalf of their coworkers and are supposed to defend their interests, for example, when it comes to issues such as working conditions, health and safety, pay, restructuring, job security, and inclusion.

This article focuses on the influence of ERs on organizational decision-making, exploring the role of perceived competences of ERs and their conflict behavior. This issue is relevant for any agentic role in decision-making. Within organizations, for example, we often find committees with employees, academic staff, student representatives, or representatives of clients or patients, to be consulted on a variety of issues. Are they taken seriously enough in decision-making? And what contributes most to their influence? With addressing the role of competences and conflict behavior, this study contributes to the existing literature in four ways: (a) It offers unique data on perceptions of HR directors on antecedents and consequences of conflict behavior by ERs, a subject hardly studied and also relevant for other agentic roles, (b) It investigates the relation between perceived competences, conflict behaviors, and types of conflict issues, thereby extending the framework of competences and testing this in a context of representatives, (c) It examines the conglomerate conflict behavior theory (CCB; Van de Vliert, Euwema, & Huismans, 1995) that links the combination of different behaviors to different types of conflictive issues in the context of industrial relations, and (d) It aims to contribute with practical tools for agents in conflictive decision-making, particularly in industrial relations.

Employee Representatives Participating in Organizational Decision-Making

Collective conflicts are part of organizational dynamics, particularly when the interests of management and employees are not aligned (Lewicki, Elgoibar, & Euwema, 2016). To promote integration of perspectives, quality of decision-making and support for organizational decisions, employee participation in decision-making has been a cornerstone of recent management theories (Markey & Townsend, 2013). Kallaste and Jaakson (2005, p. 5) define employee participation as: “his/her opportunity to participate in a company’s decision making regardless of his/her position”. Employees can exert influence by two types of participation. *Direct participation*, meaning the influence employees exert at the shop or office floor level (Markey, Ravenswood, Webber, & Knudsen, 2013). This involves employees directly, particularly at shop floor level (Kallaste & Jaakson, 2005). *Indirect participation* means the influence exerted through representatives of employees (Markey et al., 2013; Wilkinson, Gollan, Marchington, & Lewin, 2010). This type of participation aims for a fairer division of power within the organization (Summers & Hyman, 2005) on a structural level. It also impacts a broader range of decisions (Knudsen, 1995), including health and safety, inclusion policies, and downsizing and restructuring (Van den Berg, Grift, & Van Witteloostuijn, 2011; Van der Brempt, 2014). The articles composing this dissertation focus on such indirect participation.

One of the institutionalized forms of indirect participation is often referred to as social dialogue, and defined as: “discussions, consultations, negotiations, and joint actions involving organizations representing the two sides of industry, both employers and workers. It is a process by which relevant parties seek to resolve employment-related differences via an information exchange” (Bryson, Forth, & George, 2012, p. 5). Social dialogue as a formal platform for consultation and participation in decision-making has a long tradition, particularly in Europe. HR managers and works councils generally represent the two sides of the table of these joint actions. The European Union legislation requires a works council in organizations with 50 or more employees. Employees of the organization elect their representatives for this works council. ERs are typically elected for a period of four years and have a protected position (Stegmaier, 2012). ERs are normally employed in the organization and have a part-time or full-time role representing their coworkers in negotiations, different types

of organizational conflicts, and decision-making processes with management (Conchon, 2013a, 2013b; Euwema, Munduate, Elgoibar, Garcia, & Pender, 2015; Munduate, Euwema, & Elgoibar, 2012). The works council meets with top management to discuss all issues relevant for employees in the organization. Typically, the HR director plays a key role in these meetings representing management.

The regulations toward works councils, elections, and the rights of ERs differ between EU member states (Conchon, 2013b; Pulignano, Martinez-Lucio, & Whittall, 2012). ERs have under European law, as well as under national laws, quite some decisive power when it comes to vital issues in the organization, varying from health and safety to mergers and acquisitions (Euwema et al., 2015). Nevertheless, it is less clear what the actual influence of ERs is on the decision-making. “Influence is ‘power in action,’ just as power is ‘potential influence’” (French & Raven, 1959, p. 261). Influence and power are thus seen as two parts of the same coin. Anderson and Brion (2014) expressed this by stating: “Power represents a source of potential influence that may or may not be realized through compliance from others (2014, p 69).” Indeed, ERs often have a large potential to influence, which is based on different sources, varying from labor law to personal competences and working relationships with management (Martínez Lucio, 2016; Munduate & Medina, 2017). Given the importance of power for organizational dynamics, social scientists have analyzed how individuals achieve power within organizational groups; that is, how they gain respect, prominence, and influence in the eyes of others (Galinsky & Kilduff, 2013).

The theory of bases of social power (French & Raven, 1959) examines the sources and specific resources used by powerholders to influence others. This classic theory proposes five bases of power: reward, coercion, legitimacy, reference, and expertise. ERs gain more influence in decision-making with management, depending on the different power sources available and their willingness and ability to use these. There is evidence that the nature of the resource that a powerholder controls may affect how the other party responds to that power (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). For example, Munduate and Dorado (1998) found that the use of expert power, or being perceived as competent, promotes a cooperative relationship with the other party. *Expert power* is defined as target’s perception of having expertise or knowledge in a specific domain (French & Raven, 1959). Following French and Raven (1959) and Korsgaard, Schweiger, and Sapienza (1995), we define influence in this context as the degree to

which ERs' input affects or is reflected in the final decision. According to Marginson, Hall, Hoffmann, and Müller (2004), maximal influence is achieved when an organizational decision, taken by management, is substantively changed as the result of the influence exerted by the works council. *"A more minimal impact is acquired when the implementation of a decision made by management is changed by ERs' exerted influence"* (Marginson et al., 2004, p. 211).

Based on the relationship with management, several authors distinguish five types of works councils: antagonistic, tough, cooperative, passive, and excluded by management (Dilger, 2002; Frick, 2002; Nienhueser, 2009). According to Nienhueser (2009), the influence of ERs in the decision-making process is related to these types of works council. For example, Dilger (2002) shows that tough and cooperative works councils have a positive effect on work-time arrangements, and organizations with cooperative works councils show less labor turnover. Antagonistic works councils correspond with less attraction of employees toward the organization (Nienhueser, 2009). According to Wigboldus, Louse, and Nijhof (2008), positive effects of participation only occur if management welcomes the information provided by ERs and consider applying this for making improvements. Addison (2005) additionally stated that by a higher involvement of works councils, managers get more acquainted with the attitudes and opinions of the employees (Wigboldus et al., 2008). When ERs are highly integrated and connected to management, they participate actively, while in case of a low integration they are largely excluded from essential management decision-making processes, or the issues at stake are minimized or delayed (Levinson, 2001). This brings us to the issues at the negotiation table.

Employee representatives are meeting with management on a large variety of issues. Some of these are obligatory, and defined by law, and therefore can be seen as traditional issues, such as working conditions, working hours, and wages (Guest, 2016), as well as the organization of jobs (Van der Brempt, 2014). Other issues have developed more recently and are therefore referred to as innovative issues. These often are less evident to discuss, and putting these on the agenda might depend more on the relationship between management and ERs. For example, when relations are cooperative, management might be more open for initiatives to discuss employee-related issues such as inclusive HR, sustainability issues, or training and support (Van Gyes, 2010). Workers are increasingly concerned with issues like learning, dignified

treatment, transparency, integrity, and personal development. Therefore, in this study we differentiate between two types of issues: (a) *traditional issues*, such as working hours, pay, incentive systems, and performance targets; and (b) *innovative issues*, such as work–life balance, equality, green issues, and corporate social responsibility (Cutcher-Gershenfeld & Kochan, 2004). In the area of industrial relations, to our knowledge no studies have been conducted relating perceived competences and conflict behavior to the influence of ERs on decision-making in these different domains.

Based on general negotiation theory, it is well documented that skilled negotiators are more effective and build up their power in organizations (Soares & Passos, 2012). ERs' communication and negotiation with management is often related to conflictive issues; therefore, both cooperative and competitive conflict behaviors of ERs might contribute to their influence. Figure 1 presents our research model and the hypotheses, which will be discussed below.

Competences and Influence of ERs in Organizational Decision-Making on Traditional and Innovative Issues

To gain influence in decision-making, ERs can use different power sources, such as legitimate rights or mobilization of constituencies. According to Yukl and Fables (1991), power sources are related to either positional or personal power. *Positional power* arises from the status held in a group or organization, and *personal power* arises from personal attributes and the kind of relationship established with the other party. Reward, coercion, and legitimacy power bases are related to positional power, while expertise and reference relate to personal power. ERs gain maximum influence using both positional and personal power. However, combining these two is not evident. Management might perceive ERs as having positional power, for example when they are in a position to block decision-making. These ERs might not have personal power toward management, when they are not seen as competent counterparts. In case of sensitive issues for the constituency, ERs might feel pressured to use their positional power, showing through high demands and threats. However, this might not necessarily result in more influence and better outcomes for them (Aaldering & De Dreu, 2012). If, however, ERs pay attention to the more cooperative employees among their constituencies, they might gain personal power in their

relationship with management and achieve more integrative results (Aaldering & De Dreu, 2012).

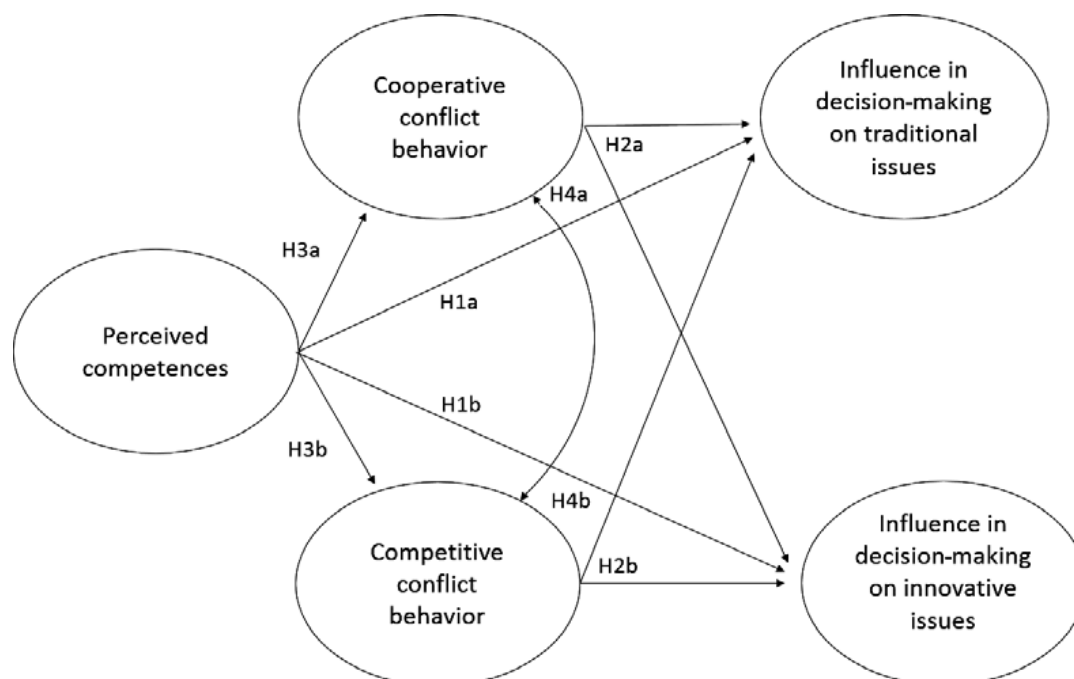


Figure 3.1. Research model and hypotheses

Agents such as ERs have to balance between various interests: those of their constituencies (not necessarily sharing all the same interests), the organization (in their role as being employees), other ERs, and their own self-interest as agents and employees. Being a competent ER therefore can be quite challenging and stressful (Elgoibar, 2013). Spencer and Spencer (1993, p. 9) define *competence* as: “the underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to criterion-referenced effective and/or superior performance in a job situation.” Managers perceive ERs as competent, to the extent that are knowledge- able, have the appropriate skills, and adequate attitudes (Soares & Passos, 2012). However, managers perceive that ERs often lack important competences, such as knowledge about business economics and change, and proactive and innovative attitudes (Euwema et al., 2015). In addition, HR managers and ERs have different perspectives on the organization. This is related to their position, but also to differ- ence in values (Lewicki et al., 2016), education, and business training. Large differences in qualifications between ERs and management reduce their participation and their influence (Jirjahn & Smith, 2006). According to Van der Brempt (2014), ERs have more influence in decision-making when they share comparable values and attitudes with management, as ERs will be perceived as more

competent. The theory on bases of power predicts that expertise and competences of ERs, related to both traditional and innovative issues, contribute to their personal power. Therefore, they are important sources to influence decision-making processes with management. Based on this theory, we expect a positive relation between perceived competences and influence on decision-making by ERs, and we expect so for both types of issues.

H1: Perceived competences of ERs are positively related to influence of ERs, both for traditional (H1a) and innovative (H1b) issues.

Conflict Behavior by ERs and Influence in Decision-Making

Conflict behavior can be defined as “a parties’ reaction to the perceptions that one’s own and other party’s current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously” (Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994, p. 20). Conflict behavior can be cooperative and competitive. *Cooperative behaviors* are those in which a party takes into account the interests of the other party in relation to the conflict issues. Cooperation is working together with the other party to achieve a common set goal, such as to find an optimal solution for conflictive interests. *Competitive behavior* on the other hand refers to parties striving toward their own goals and interests, on the expense of the other party, and perceiving no common goal to achieve (Carnevale & Pruitt, 1992).

In industrial relations, and in negotiations more generally, cooperation does not necessarily imply also a strong impact on the decision-making by both parties. Particularly when facing conflictive issues between management and employees, competitive actions are sometimes needed to achieve power balance (Van de Vliert et al., 1995). Walton and McKersie (1995) already acknowledged that in industrial relations, competitive and cooperative behaviors both have their merits. In their work, they emphasize the importance of combining both behaviors. This is due to the fact that most negotiations in this context are complex and multi-issue, with integrative potential requiring cooperative and creative problem solving behavior, as well as with distributive elements also requiring competitive behavior (Euwema et al., 2015; Sebenius, 2015; Walton & McKersie, 1995).

Studying the effects of the combination of conflict behaviors is the essence of the theory of conglomerate conflict behavior, or CCB (Munduate, Ganaza, Peiró, & Euwema, 1999; Van de Vliert et al., 1995). CCB theory states that most conflict and negotiation situations are complex, and in these situations, a combination of cooperation and competition, either sequential or simultaneous, is common as well as beneficial (Euwema & Van Emmerik, 2007; Van de Vliert et al., 1995). Several studies show that competing behaviors (such as forcing) and cooperative behaviors (such as problem solving) do not necessarily exclude one another (Elgoibar, 2013; Medina & Benitez, 2011). Furthermore, the combination of these behaviors contributes to effective outcomes (Euwema, Van de Vliert, & Bakker, 2003). Van de Vliert, Nauta, Euwema, and Janssen (1997), for example, showed that the combination of problem solving (co-operative behavior) and forcing (competitive behavior) results in better outcomes, both for the actor, and for the joint outcomes of parties (see also Emans, Munduate, Klever, & Van de Vliert, 2003). Munduate et al. (1999) showed that complex conflict behavior, combining different styles, results in the most optimal conflict outcomes. Cialdini and Goldstein (2004) also demonstrated the effectiveness of combining soft and hard tactics of influence. In line with this, Martinez, Munduate, and Medina (2008) found that using a broader range of tactics is more effective than using a smaller range of tactics in terms of the target's satisfaction, commitment, and well-being. So, taken together research on different areas of conflict management and influence shows that the combination of cooperative and competitive behavior contributes to effective outcomes.

Research on conflict behavior by ERs is scarce (Garcia, Pender, & Elgoibar, 2016). A recent study by Elgoibar, Munduate, and Euwema (2012) among Spanish ERs showed a high use of the combination of integrating and forcing conflict behavior. Also, these two behaviors were positively related (Elgoibar, 2013). However, this study was based on ERs' self-reports, and it is likely that others, such as management, do perceive conglomerated conflict behavior differently. More specifically, they might be inclined to perceive more of a contrast between integrating and forcing (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). Often competitive or forcing behavior is negatively related to outcomes when studied as a unique style (Deutsch, 2014). We expect that when considered together, competitive and cooperative conflict behaviors contribute

positively to the perceived influence of ERs in organizational decision-making. This might be so for both types of issues.

H2: As parts of a conglomerate, cooperative and competitive conflict behavior by ERs are positively related to perceived influence of ERs, both for traditional (H2a) and innovative (H2b) issues.

Perceived Competences and Conflict Behavior by ERs

There is substantial literature on the perceived competence in conflict management related to conflict behavior (Gross & Guerrero, 2000; Gross, Guerrero, & Alberts, 2004; Suppiah & Rose, 2006). Studies in this area focus on the appropriateness and effectiveness of different conflict behaviors. For instance, Gross and colleagues clearly demonstrate that cooperative behavior, particularly integrating, is perceived as highly competent, while forcing behavior is mostly perceived as a less competent way of dealing with conflict. Parties themselves see merit in forcing, particularly when combined with integrating behavior. However, the counterpart does usually not perceive forcing as competent conflict management (Gross & Guerrero, 2000; Gross et al., 2004). This competence-based approach of conflict behavior is relevant for our study as competence in conflict management and negotiation is seen as an essential skill for ERs, both by themselves (Munduate et al., 2012), as well as by employers (Euwema et al., 2015). Based on the above-mentioned studies by Gross and colleagues, we might postulate that there is a positive relation between cooperative conflict behavior and competences of ERs as perceived by management, while a negative relation might exist between competitive conflict behavior and perceived competences of ERs.

Competences of ERs are not limited to conflict skills, and are related to knowledge (i.e., labor law and business), and a variety of both hard and soft skills, including communication and negotiation skills (Munduate et al., 2012; Soares & Passos, 2012; Van der Brempt, 2014). Competences of ERs, as perceived by management, are summarized as a positive attitude toward change, high levels of expertise, and an integrative focus, which includes concern for the companies' interests and needs. From the perspective of employers, perceived competences of ERs are related to a cooperative attitude and related behaviors, while competitive behaviors are perceived as problematic (Euwema et al., 2015). Hence, we expect:

H3: Perceived competences of ERs are positively related to cooperative conflict behavior (H3a) and negatively related to competitive conflict behavior by ERs (H3b).

Conflict Behavior Mediating the Relation Between Competences and Influence of ERs

Industrial relations are prone to conflict by nature (Gilliland, Gross, & Hogler, 2014; Lewicki et al., 2016; Llorente, Luchi, & Sioli, 2013). Therefore, the way conflict is managed is critically important and related to ERs' influence in decision-making. Jirjahn and Smith (2006) showed in a review of German works councils, that a more cooperative climate and related behaviors contribute to the acceptance of participation of ERs. This is in line with Van der Brempt (2014, p 23) who argues: "employee representatives will hold the most favorable perspective of works council effectiveness when managers and ERs cooperate to resolve work floor bottlenecks and make high-quality decisions. This is in line with organizational behavior research, showing that cooperation is one of the principle antecedents of high-quality decisions, group members' satisfaction, willingness to stay in the group and high task performance influence of works councils." So, cooperation indeed contributes to influence of works councils. Cooperation, in its turn, is driven by perceived trustworthiness (Ferrin, Bligh, & Kohles, 2008; Munduate, Euwema, & Elgoibar, 2016). One of the components of trustworthiness is the ability, or competences of the other (Bollen & Euwema, 2014; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). So, we assume that the relation between perceived competences and influence of ERs might be mediated by their conflict behavior. Competent ERs are effective in managing conflict, and by doing so, they gain influence in the decision-making.

Previously, we also argued that, for ERs to gain influence, a combination of cooperative and competitive behavior is most effective. How will these conflict behaviors mediate the relation between perceived competences and influence? It seems somewhat paradoxical that employers might perceive competent ERs as more cooperative and less competitive (H3) while these behaviors are both expected to contribute positively to ERs' influence (H2). The way in which these behaviors mediate the relation between perceived competences and influence might thus be different. CCB theory prescribes to look at this mediation in congruence. Therefore,

the mediating role of these behaviors is best understood when we take both into account simultaneously. As components of a conglomerate, we expect that both cooperative and competitive conflict behavior by ERs partly mediate the relation between perceived competences and influence in decision-making. We expect so for decision-making on traditional as well as innovative issues. Additionally, we explore to what extent these effects differ for these two types of issues. Traditional issues such as pay, incentives, and working hours, may also be seen as distributive issues. When it comes to pay, it might be more difficult to find integrative potential compared to innovative issues, such as health and safety. For example, both employers and employees benefit from a reduction of sick leave. So, it is not unlikely that to gain influence on traditional issues, competitive behavior is needed more, compared to innovative issues, and the other way around for cooperative behaviors. Hence, we formulate

H4: The relation between perceived competences of ERs and their influence on organizational decision-making is mediated by cooperative and competitive conflict behavior both for traditional (H4a) and innovative (H4b) issues.

3.2 Method

Procedure and Respondents

To test our hypotheses, data were collected through an online survey in 11 European countries: Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom. In all countries, HR directors and managers, from different sectors and sizes, were invited to participate using different networks in each participating country. We followed random sampling procedures in each country, distributing the surveys among networks, without preselection. We focused on HR directors and HR managers as they deal in most organizations most frequently with ERs and are engaged in most negotiations. Overall, 614 HR directors and HR managers completed the survey. The average age of the participants was 43.5 years, with 50% male and 47% female respondents (3% unanswered). The survey and instructions were translated into 10 languages (Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, French, German, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, and Spanish). For Belgium, both Dutch and French surveys were made available. In addition to measuring our key variables, information on participants (age, gender, role, education, years actively in contact with

ERs), and organizations (number of employees, economic conditions) was gathered. We also conducted more than 100 interviews with HR directors, which are used to contextualize our results and illustrate our findings.

Measures

Perceived Competences of ERs

This construct was measured through nine items of a scale developed for competences of ERs (Munduate et al., 2012). The question was: “To what extent do you believe that ERs are competent in...?” (e.g., labor law, HRM, social skills; see Appendix 1 for the complete list of items). The respondents rated these competences on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. Following George and Mallery (2003), reliabilities for the scales were good, with Cronbach’s alpha .94.

Cooperative and Competitive Conflict Behavior

These measures are based on Hempel, Zhang, and Tjosvold’s (2009) conflict behavior scale. The current scale includes four items of the original five items’ subscales. An example for cooperative behavior is: “Employee representatives encourage a ‘we are in it together’ attitude.” An example for competitive behavior is: “Employee representatives treat conflict as a win-lose contest.” Respondents rated these behaviors on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (1 = not at all; 5 = very much). Following George and Mallery (2003), reliabilities for the scales are good, with Cronbach’s alphas of .85 for cooperative behavior and .91 for competitive behavior.

Influence of ERs

Influence of ERs on organizational decision-making has been explored through items originally developed by Munduate et al. (2012). Likert scales ranging from 1 (no impact) to 5 (high impact) were used to assess participants’ opinions on ERs’ influence related to a variety of organizational issues. The main question being: “To what extent do employee representatives in your organization have impact on the following subjects (referring to: working hours, training, career development, pay and incentives, performance targets, work-life balance, equality issues, corporate social

responsibility, health and safety, and green issues)?” An exploratory factor analysis resulted in two factors, which were labeled traditional and innovative issues. The item on training and career development loaded on both factors, and they were for that reason left out of further analyses. Reliabilities for the scales were acceptable to good with Cronbach’s alphas being .74 for traditional issues (three items: working hours, pay and incentives, and performance targets) and .86 for innovative issues (five items: work-life balance, equality issues, corporate social responsibility, health and safety, and green issues).

3.3 Results

Table 3.1 displays the descriptive data. Influence of ERs in organizational decision-making is limited, with an average score below the mean scale of the score between “little impact” and “some impact.” Influence is higher regarding innovative issues ($M = 2.81$) as compared to influence on traditional issues ($M = 2.65$). With regard to conflict behavior, ERs on average show slightly more cooperative behavior ($M = 2.74$) than competitive behavior ($M = 2.63$). Finally, their competences are perceived as below the mean of the scale, indicating a modest competence level ($M = 2.45$). As expected, perceived competences are positively related to influence, both on traditional issues ($r = .30, p < .01$), as well as on innovative issues ($r = .45, p < .01$).

Table 3.1. *Descriptive Statistics of the Research Variables (N=614)*

	M	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1 Gender	1.46	.52	1					
2 Age	43.24	9.70	-.18**	1				
3 Perceived competences	2.45	0.77	.24*	-.00	1			
4 Cooperative CB	2.74	0.99	-.00	-.00	.61**	1		
5 Competitive CB	2.63	0.95	-.10*	-.00	-.24**	-.41**	1	
6 Influence on traditional issues	2.65	0.89	-.08*	-.01	.30**	.21**	.16**	1
7 Influence on Innovative issues	2.81	0.82	-.11**	.05	.45**	.43**	-.01	.53**

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < .01$

Furthermore, perceived competences are positively related to cooperative conflict behavior and negatively related to competitive conflict behavior. Cooperative conflict behavior by ERs is positively related to influence of ERs, both on innovative and traditional issues. Competitive conflict behavior by ERs is positively related to

influence on traditional issues. Cooperative and competitive conflict behavior are negatively related. Gender is positively related to perceived competences, indicating female HR directors perceive ERs as more competent compared to male HR directors.

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted to test all hypotheses simultaneously, given that the model assumes relations between both mediating variables and the two dependent variables. The analyses were conducted with SPSS AMOS (Arbuckle, 2014). As control variables, gender, age, and country of respondent were included. To estimate the standard errors and the confidence intervals of indirect effects, we performed bootstrapping (10,000 samples and 95% bootstrap confidence intervals).

The final model is presented in Figure 3.2. This model shows an acceptable fit ($\chi^2 = 786.800$; $df = 254$, $\chi^2/df = 3.098$; RMSEA = 0.059, CFI = 0.942, and TLI = 0.931), which means the model fits well to the data (Weston & Gore, 2006). As a check, we performed, SEM multigroup analyses (Arbuckle, 2014) on gender and age, and this did not change the results and these control variables are therefore excluded from the reported results. We also added country as a control variable, but we did not have enough cases for most of the countries to perform a reliable multigroup analysis. However, controlling for country also resulted in a fitting model, with only marginal changes on all relevant parameters (RMSEA: 0.065, CFI: 0.89, and TLI: 0.88).

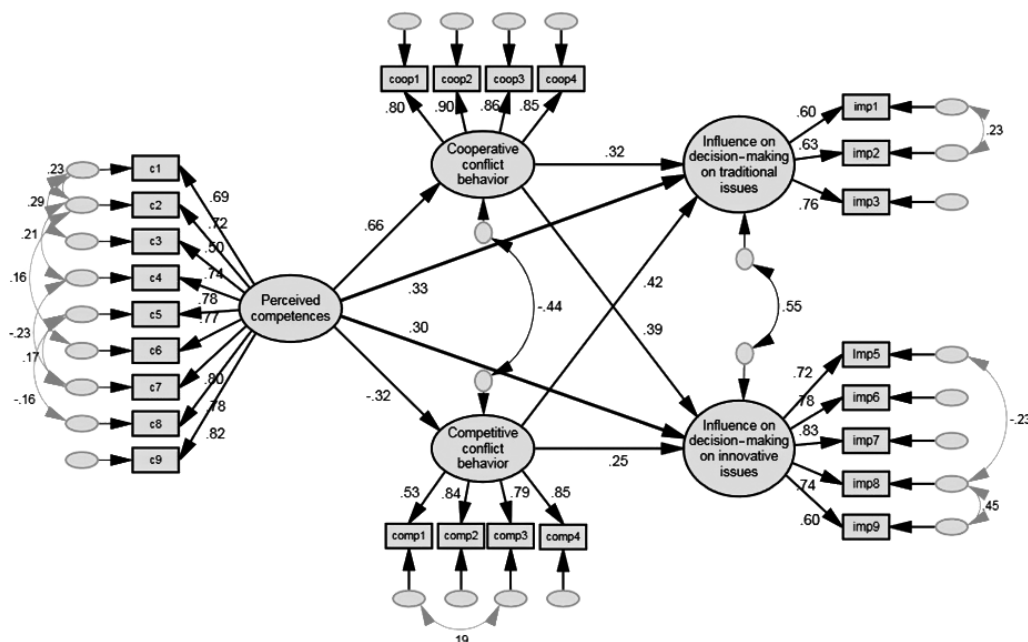


Figure 3.2. Structural equation modeling of the key research variables

Table 3.2. *Direct and indirect effects of perceived competences on influence*

	Standardized effect	SE	p
Perceived competences and influence on traditional issues (TI)			
Total effect	0.405	0.056	.00
Direct effect	0.325	0.067	.00
Indirect effect	0.080	0.050	.11
Competences → Cooperative CB → TI	0.211		
Competences → Competitive CB → TI	-0.134		
Perceived competences and influence on innovative issues (InI)			
Total effect	0.477	0.042	.00
Direct effect	0.301	0.059	.00
Indirect effect	0.176	0.042	.00
Competences → Cooperative CB → InI	0.257		
Competences → Competitive CB → InI	-0.080		

Most respondents did not specify the organization. For that reason, we were not able to code the sectors in a meaningful way.

The model shows all expected relations, thus offering support for H1 (perceived competences are positively related to influence in decision-making on tradition (H1a) and innovative (H1b) issues and H2 (as parts of a conglomerate, cooperative and competitive conflict behavior contribute positively to influence on decision-making on traditional issues (H2a) and innovative issues (H2b). Perceived competences are positively related to cooperative conflict behavior (H3a) and negatively related to competitive conflict behavior (H3b).

To test H4, mediation of conflict behaviors on the relation between perceived competences and influence, we explored the multiple direct and indirect effects of perceived competences on influence in greater detail. Table 2 presents the relevant estimated parameters separately for the influence on traditional and innovative issues. The indirect, or mediation, effect for influence on decision-making of traditional issues is not significant (see Table 2). However, when a closer look reveals that opposite mediating effects exist. The positive path from competencies through cooperative conflict behavior is almost eliminated by the negative path through competitive conflict behavior. The joint effect of both indirect effects eliminates the total mediation effect, an example of “net suppression” as described in Zhao, Lynch, and Chen (2010, p 204). In case of the relation between ERs’ competences and innovative issues, the

same mechanism is observed; however, in this case the joint effect of both indirect paths remains significant, given the relative strong positive effect through cooperative conflict behavior, compared to the small negative parameter from competitive conflict behavior. Hence, H4 is partly confirmed.

3.4 Discussion

The current study focuses on the influence of employee representatives (ERs) on organizational decision-making. In many organizations, ERs negotiate with management on behalf of their coworkers and are engaged in decision-making on a large variety of issues. We investigated the perceptions of HR directors in European organizations, who are the natural counterparts of ERs at the negotiation table. Despite the formal and legal position of ERs in European organizations, their impact on organizational decision-making is disputed. Although their formal power might be substantial, it is to a large extent management who either empowers ERs or minimizes their influence, reducing them in some cases to “toothless tigers” (Elgoibar, 2013). By way of illustration, we present some representative quotes of the HR directors we interviewed, to interpret the quantitative findings. Our study adds six contributions to the knowledge of influence by representatives in decision-making. We conclude this, by addressing possible implications for other agentic roles.

ERs’ Perceived Competences are Key to Their Influence in Organizational Decision-Making

First of all, this study shows a positive relationship between perceived competences of ERs and their perceived influence on both traditional and innovative issues. This outcome is in line with the theory of bases of power (French & Raven, 1959), underscoring that perceived competence can be seen as expert power (Munduate & Medina, 2017). Expert power is typically linked to specific areas of expertise. Our current study takes a much broader perspective, showing that the general perception of competences is directly related to influence in decision-making on different types of issues. In our study, the assessment of competences resulted in one factor, covering a broad range of expertise and hard and soft skills. This is a strong indication that HR directors make a more holistic evaluation of the competences of ERs. It is noteworthy here to mention that in a previous European study (Munduate et

al., 2012), ERs self-perception of competences resulted in two factors: “hard” (e.g., business knowledge) and “soft” skills (e.g., communication). This raises interesting questions about perceptions of expertise power in negotiations and conflict management, comparing self-perceived competence—in terms of Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy (1977)—to the perception by the counterpart, as well as the type of assessments made.

HR managers expressed the utmost importance of competent ERs: “ERs need to understand the dynamics of the organizations, finance and change management”; “We need highly competent people on the other side of the table.” Our study shows there is a general concern toward the lack of competences of ERs, as expressed by relative low scores. This lack of competences is reflected in quotes such as “The worst is, when ERs are incompetent and rigid.” HR managers suggested specific trainings for ERs regarding problem solving, leadership skills, ability to influence, negotiation skills, communication skills, general business knowledge, creative sense, sense of responsibility, and initiative. HR directors also explicitly make the connection between ERs’ competences and influence, expressing they tend to minimize their involvement when they perceive lack of competences. Noteworthy, most interviewed HR directors do appreciate competent counterparts and value the system of elected ERs as a model of participative decision-making.

Conglomerate Conflict Behavior Contributes to Influence on Decision-Making

The current study shows that both competitive and cooperative behaviors contribute positively to ERs influence on decision-making, when these behaviors are taken into account simultaneously. It is worth noticing that this is the perception of management, being the counterpart in the decision-making. Even ERs’ counterpart perceives that both behaviors are contributing to the influence of ERs. This finding confirms the theory of conglomerate conflict behavior (Munduate et al., 1999; Van de Vliert et al., 1995). Cooperative and competitive conflict behavior do not necessarily exclude one another. In organizational decision-making, issues are usually complex, with a diversity of interests at the table. A combination of cooperation and competition appears to contribute most to the influence of ERs. The older dichotomy of competitive or cooperative behavior does not fit well to these types of situations. It is noteworthy that competitive and cooperative conflict behaviors by ERs are negatively related in the

perception of HR directors. A previous study among ERs in Europe showed a strong positive relation between forcing and integrating, when ERs reported their own conflict behavior (Elgoibar, 2013). Promoting a combination of cooperative and competitive behaviors when dealing with conflict is a complex challenge, as competitive behavior is usually impacting the perceived competence in a negative way, as we will discuss below.

Perceived Competences are Related to ER Conflict Behavior

To the best of our knowledge, our study is the first study among HR directors or management to assess competences and conflict behavior by ERs. As expected, the perceptions of competences of ERs are positively related to cooperative conflict behavior by ERs and negatively related to competitive behavior. For HR managers, competence of ERs is strongly related to cooperative behavior. These outcomes underscore previous studies on perceived competence in conflict management. For instance, Gross and Guerrero (2000) and Gross et al. (2004) showed that perceived competence by counterparts is related to cooperative, problem solving behaviors, while the counterpart sees forcing behavior as incompetent.

In our study, we observed a paradox. Management recognizes that competitive conflict behavior is beneficial for ERs as it increases their influence. Yet, they see competence as negatively related to this competitive conflict behavior of ERs. This outcome reflects a structural problem in involving employees, and particularly ERs, in organizational decision-making. Involving employees neither imply that employees will agree with the views of management, nor accept their proposals and ideas. By having competent representatives, management will have to face the challenge that this implies “constructive controversy” (Tjosvold, Wong, & Feng Chen, 2014), including competing behavior by representatives who argue and fight for their own views and interests. Although management does recognize this need, it also appears to be ambivalent about it.

Conflict Issues Matter

We tested the relationships between competences, conflict behavior and influence, both for innovative and traditional issues. First of all, it should be noted that influence in decision-making does differ depending on the issues at stake. Our study

shows somewhat more influence of ERs on innovative issues, compared to traditional issues. However, for both types of issues perceived competences are key to gain influence, and also cooperative behavior and competitive behavior are related. Competitive behavior seems to be more related to influence on traditional issues, whereas cooperative behavior seems to be more related to influence on innovative issues.

An explanation for this result might be found in the distinction between integration and distribution as parts of negotiation (Lax & Sebenius, 1986; Neale & Bazerman, 1992; Sebenius, 2015). Integration is defined as: “The enlargement of the pie of available resources”; and distribution as: “The claiming of the pie” (Neale & Bazerman, 1992, p. 170). An explanation for the observed differences between the two types of issues might be that traditional issues also are often more distributive in nature, while innovative issues have more integrative potential. Gaining influence in the decision-making for distributive issues might require more competitive behavior in addition to cooperative behavior (Euwema et al., 2003; Lax & Sebenius, 1992).

Conglomerate Conflict Behavior Mediates the Relation of Competences and Influence

Perceived competence is related to influence, and this relation is partly mediated by conglomerate conflict behavior. A clear mediation effect was observed of influence on innovative issues but not on traditional issues. This is most likely due to a “net-suppression effect,” as the mediation through cooperative behavior is “compensated” by the mediation through competitive behavior. This result might be interpreted in line with our previous reflection on the differences between traditional and innovative issues. Here also, the tension between cooperative and competitive behavior becomes visible.

For HR directors, it seems sometimes difficult to appreciate this conglomerate conflict behavior by ERs, as they perceive only cooperative behavior as competent. However, ERs face a constant tension between the interests of the organization and those of its employees (Parker & Slaughter, 1988; Van der Brempt, 2014). By engaging into a partnership with management too strongly, ERs risk losing legitimacy with their colleagues (Rolfsen, 2011). According to Rolfsen, the relationship needs to be at least a little controversial. Jenkins (2007) also described an exclusive cooperative relationship between ERs and management as being a risk. Hereby ERs

may lose their main focus as being representatives of employees' interests. A combination of cooperation and competition may be the most beneficial for both management and ERs (Huzzard & Nilsson, 2004). Competent ERs therefore should be able to combine highly cooperative behaviors with competitive conflict behavior. In the words of one of the interviewed HR directors: "Our ERs are highly competent. We respect each other's role. We both know when we have to fight in a conflict, and we know how to end it."

Representatives Acting in Decision-Making

The current study focused on officially elected ERs in European organizations. This evidently is a limited selection of representatives in organizational decision-making situations. For example, in schools and universities, all kinds of boards and committees meet to decide on issues related to education and student policies (Klemenčič, 2014; Kretchmar, 2014; Lizzio & Wilson, 2009), and representatives of different fractions meet to organize their policies. These actors are typically taking representative roles. The focal point and outcomes of the current study offer a challenging starting point to test the relationships in such contexts as well. For example, the balance between cooperative and competitive behaviors by student representatives in universities has taken many different shapes. Positional and personal power related to perceived competences of these representatives could give an interesting framework to test the importance of conflict behaviors in relation to influence in different types of conflictive issues.

3.5 Practical implications

Recruiting, Selecting and Electing Competent ERs

First and foremost, competences of ERs are recognized as essential to gain influence on decision-making, both by HR directors in this study, as well as by ERs themselves (Munduate et al., 2012). Therefore, investing in competences of ERs seems the logical step to take. However, this is less obvious than it seems. ERs are elected, and a variety of factors influence employees to run as candidate and get elected. ERs may have quite different motives, knowledge and attitudes, and surely are not a homogeneous and cohesive group (Van der Brempt, 2014). The main challenge for current works councils therefore is the recruitment, selection, and election of highly competent

employees for the role as ERs. Secondly, it is essential to form a shared vision as ERs, and use the diversity in competences to act as a cohesive and competent team (Euwema et al., 2015). A continuous development of competences within the team will boost ER's expert power (French & Raven, 1959). This is particularly needed, given the changing environment most organizations face (Martínez-Lucio, 2016). Developing competences as power source contributes to constructive conflict management and cooperative relations. When ERs lack such competences, they will more easily rely on their positional power, which results in more antagonistic relations with management.

Training and Development

Investing in competence development is certainly important. However, our study draws attention to the perception of competences by the employer. Perceptions are by definition biased, and this certainly is true for agentic relations in a conflictual relationship. Competences need to be recognized and valued as such, and our study indicates that, for example, management does not value competitive conflict skills of ERs. So, investing in recognition of competences is essential to develop also reference power of ERs. Traditionally, development of competences by ERs is done by unions, and management is not involved. However, recently there are experiments that also involve experts and senior management to educate works councils and ERs. Sometimes works councils even train together with management (Nauta, 2015).

Educating Management

So far, the focus has been on what ERs can contribute to gain influence in decision-making. However, HR directors and managers indicate they appreciate competent and strong representatives at the table. However, many of them define this as only cooperative. Educating management in the dualities and possibilities of a strong employee representation surely can contribute, not only to more influence of ERs but also to more cooperative relations, thereby improving the quality of decision-making and implementation (Munduate & Medina, 2017). Nowadays, management education often lacks information about social dialogue and the possible benefits of institutionalized forms of employee representation, collective rights, and the role

specific behaviors, which are required to perform well in these agentic dynamics (Martínez-Lucio, 2016).

3.6 Limitations and future research

First of all, our study is cross-sectional; therefore, no conclusions about causality can be drawn. Future research could contribute by doing longitudinal research on the dynamic relations between perceived competences, conflict behaviors and influence in decision-making. Secondly, in such studies, also multi- source data and multiple perspectives from ERs, management, and constituencies would be needed to better understand these dynamics. Thirdly, the context is important to take into account, as industrial relations are embedded in legal and cultural realities.

The current study was conducted in 11 European countries. Results, however, were consistent over these countries and future studies could test if this also holds in other societies, particularly for those with different traditions of indirect participation in organizational decision-making. Finally, the complex relation of perceived power and conflict behaviors, as suggested also by Anderson and Brion (2014), certainly needs more exploration, also in the context of industrial relations. This would allow to study under what conditions perceived power is inducing cooperative behaviors and competitive behaviors by representatives of both, management and employees.

3.7 General Conclusion

Due to a changing environment, the relationship between management and ERs is at increasing risk of conflict. Both parties therefore benefit from developing competences and conflict management skills. This study demonstrates the complexity of the behavioral patterns resulting in influence for ERs; as the main challenge is being able to find the right balance between competitive and cooperative behaviors, and the effect of this balance on the diverse issues at stake. Employers as well as ERs will benefit from investing toward mastering these complex behaviors.

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Chapter 5. The tower of power: building innovative organizations through social dialogue¹⁰

¹⁰ This chapter is based on: García, A. B., Pender, E., Elgoibar, P., Munduate, L., & Euwema, M. (2015). The tower of power: Building innovative organizations through social dialogue. In *Promoting social dialogue in European organizations* (pp. 179-196). Springer International Publishing.

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter we explore managers' perceptions about ERs in 11 European countries. After showing and discussing the results in each country, we present a general picture of the outcomes at European level. The leading research question in this study is, how managers of European organizations perceive the competences, attitudes and behaviors of ERs, how they perceive the relationship between management and ERs, and what their expectations are for the future, as well as their ideas for improvement. The overall study and methods are described more in detail in 'Promoting social dialogue in European organizations' (Euwema, Munduate, Elgoibar, Pender, & García, 2015). This book is based on a European study investigating the perceptions of management towards ERs, conducted by the NEIRE group (New Industrial Relations in Europe). To investigate these perceptions the following NEIRE model was developed (Figure 5.1) (Euwema, Garcia, Munduate, Elgoibar, & Pender, 2015).

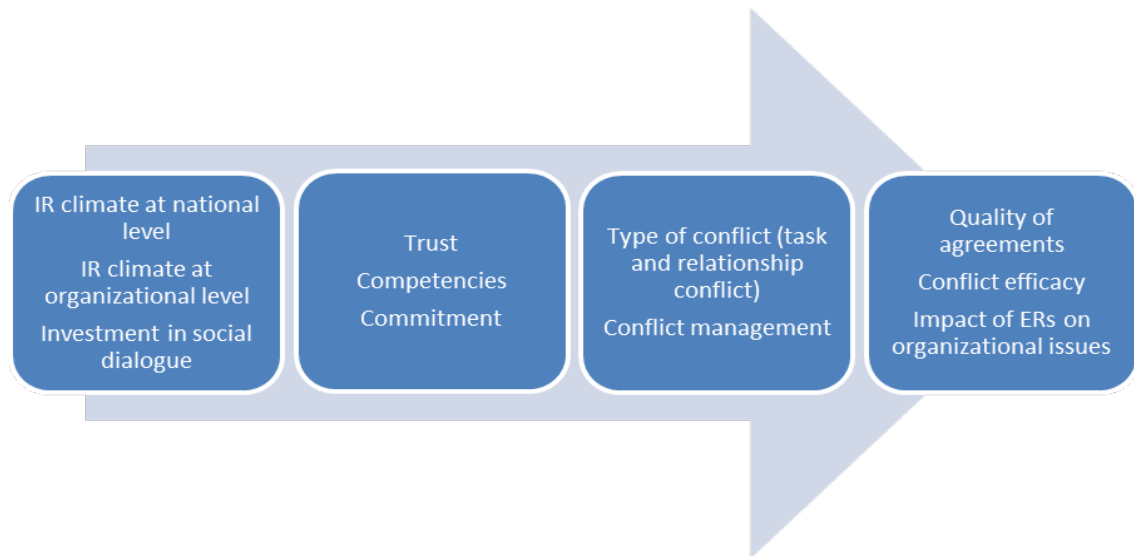


Figure 5.1: NEIRE model for industrial relations in organizations (Euwema et al, 2015)

In this chapter we aim to present a summary of good practices for achieving cooperative, innovative and constructive industrial relations, based on the factors included in the NEIRE model. These suggestions, offered by the HR managers from the different countries participating in this study, illustrate the wishes of one side of the table and bring us one step further to better understand the current European industrial relations system and their expectations, concerns, and objectives. A few quotes from our interviews illustrate this:

'Because of the crisis, we have to lay people off. This doesn't make the WC or the unions happy, so that makes the current situation difficult. However, we are able to keep a good relationship with them by ensuring that these measures are implemented in a fair way' (Personnel manager, international bank).

'We're both (employers and ERs) aware that we represent different interests. That is clear. But we are also aware that we sit in the same boat and that we have to row

together so that the boat does not sink. (...) We have different interests, but we also have similar ones and this is what brings us together: we both fight for a common optimum solution where we all feel taken care of/represented' (HR Manager, chemical industry).

'[...] I know that a good WC, a WC that is critical, is able to offer constructive suggestions to find not only a solution but a better solution because they are in a position to consider views that I am not able to take into consideration due to my position as an HR manager. For example, what factors motivate or demotivate the employees. And for this reason I support this constructive process of decision making, even when it costs a lot of time and can involve stress, because I know that through this process of compromise we will reach the best solution'(HR manager, consumer company).

These testimonies illustrate some of the most optimistic and positive views among the interviewed HR managers in the European participating countries. Collaborative attitudes and behaviors, being able to listen to the other side of the table and integrate feedback to improve their future ways of solving conflicts are keys to success in many organizations (Lewicki, Barry & Saunders, 2007). However, there is also a more pessimistic side of the coin, represented in this book where a more competitive culture is shown by both parties and therefore more pessimistic analyses of the social dialogue and conflict management. In both cases, we observed among employers the will to work together on improving this sometimes scratched relation through the improvement of trust, competences, and conflict management styles in order to survive the harsh crisis we are immersed in.

The relationship between ERs and managers has never been easy (Hyman, 2005; Martínez-Lucio & Stuart, 2005; Walton & McKersie, 1994). To a large extent, they represent two sides of the negotiation table. And the issues at the table have been traditionally often conflicting (Walton & McKersie, 1994). There are many issues also of shared interest, particularly concerning innovative issues as health and safety, gender equality, and vocational training (Pulignano, Martínez-Lucio & Whittall, 2012). Nevertheless, the strategies of the managerial board attempting to maintain a competitive business model are frequently conflicting the improvement of the workers conditions, particularly in the case of downsizing (Munduate et al., 2012). To overcome these difficulties, the exchange in social dialogue has to become innovative and cooperative (European Commission, 2012). The quotes above also illustrate the potential of cooperation between management and ERs. In contexts where conflicts are unavoidable and even necessary, there is also a need to increase the trust between parties, allowing the exchange of information that leads to agreements that can satisfy all parties involved. Of course, this ideal scenario has not yet been achieved in many cases. We offer below a cross-cultural overview, in order to discuss the results and analyze differences and commonalities in the different European countries.

5.2 Methods

Procedure and Respondents

Data were collected through an online survey in 11 European countries: Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom. In all countries, HR directors and managers, from different sectors and sizes, were invited to participate using different networks in each participating country. We followed random sampling procedures in each country, distributing the surveys among networks, without preselection.

We focused on HR directors and HR managers as they deal in most organizations frequently with ERs and are key actors in the negotiations. Overall, 614 HR directors and HR managers completed the survey. The average age of the participants was 43.5 years, with 50% male and 47% female respondents (3% unanswered). The survey and instructions were translated into 10 languages (Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, French, German, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, and Spanish). For Belgium, both Dutch and French surveys were made available. In addition to measuring our key variables, information on participants (age, gender, role, education, years actively in contact with ERs), and organizations (number of employees, economic conditions) was gathered. We also conducted more than 100 interviews with HR directors, which are used to contextualize our results and illustrate our findings.

Measures

The survey was based on the NEIRE-model. For further description and operationalization of the variables we refer to chapters 3 and 4 in this dissertation, as well as to Euwema, Garcia, et al (2015). The complete survey can be found in Appendix 2.

Analyses

We conducted Anova-tests to assess the differences in scores between each country and the European mean score (without the specific country). This analysis was aimed to get an overall comparison between the countries. Given the relative low numbers of participants, we did not control for sectors. We furthermore conducted correlational and regression analyses to explore relations between the variables. However, our first aim was to offer descriptive results, as these are lacking in the field.

The qualitative outcomes and suggestions based in the interviews, were analyzed in two steps. First, at country level this was generated by the national research coordinators. As a second step we conducted a comparison of these national reports, searching for common factors, and differences.

We present the results in two parts. Part 1 offers a mostly descriptive analysis and comparison between countries of the survey outcomes. Part 2 offers the outcomes of the interviews conducted in all countries about good practices and suggestions. This part offers a synthesis of these suggestions.

5.3 Results Part 1: Perceptions of European HR managers about ERs

Table 5.1 shows the significant differences ($p < .05$) between each country and the European mean. Green squares indicate positive results on factors contributing to constructive social dialogue (for example, high ability or low frequency of conflicts). Red squares point out negative results on factors contributing to constructive social dialogue (for example, high competitive conflict management or low level of competences of ERs). White squares indicate no significant difference to Europe.

Table 5.1 clearly shows the diversity in industrial relations climates in Europe. We make some additional observations for each country.












Belgium is on many aspects comparable to the mean European score, however otherwise the opinion of HR managers is less positive, than average. ERs are seen as been less competent than the European mean. Additionally, a high diversity about ERs is perceived. The empowerment of ERs is seen below the European average and HR managers show a higher need for control of ERs. They perceive more relational conflict. They furthermore perceive ERs as relatively competitive when it comes to conflict management.

In *Denmark*, in contrast with Belgium, ERs are on most aspects perceived more positively, than European average. The relations seem to be characterized by a relatively high trust between management and ERs and low frequency of conflicts, at task and at relational level. Furthermore, when conflicts do arise, ERs are perceived as cooperative, competent and committed.

Estonia shows a similar positive situation, trust between parties, low frequency of conflicts at both levels, higher empowerment and less need for control of managers. ERs are evaluated as more trustworthy, cooperative and competent than the European mean and this seems to be a general pattern, with low diversity among ERs. Please note however, that in Estonia a sharp contrast was observed between large, often multinational companies, and local, small to midsize organizations, in which ERs hardly play a formal role.

France, like Belgium, shows overall a more antagonistic image through the eyes of the HR Managers. We observe higher frequency of relationship conflicts related to an industrial relations climate of low trust between managers and ERs. Managers perceive ERs as less committed to the organization and less competent than the European average.

Table 5.1. *Significant differences between each country and the European mean, red indicating a negative difference, and green indicating a positive difference*

Country Variable	 BE	 DK	 EE	 FR	 GE	 IT	 NL	 PL	 PT	 SP	 UK
Industrial Relations in terms of Trust											
Ability of ERs											
Benevolence of ERs											
Integrity of ERs											
Competencies of ERs											
Organizational commitment of ERs											
Diversity in competences of ERs	High	Low	Low		Low	Low	High				
Empowerment of ERs											
Managers' need of control of ERs											
Task conflict											
Relationship conflict											
Cooperative conflict behavior by ERs											
Competitive conflict behavior by ERs											
Conflict efficacy											
Impact of ERs on traditional issues											
Impact of ERs on innovative issues											
Quality of agreements											

In *Germany* there appears to be an environment of relative trust and cooperative relationships, where ERs have impact on traditional and innovative decisions related to the codetermination system. Collective agreements inside the organization are also

perceived as having higher quality than the European mean; however German managers also seem to have a higher need for control.

Italy doesn't display great differences with Europe, and shows a more positive picture when talking about frequency of relationship conflicts, cooperative conflict management of ERs and efficacy of handling conflicts.

Dutch ERs are described by the HR managers as more cooperative and committed than the European average, with less task conflicts and more impact on innovative issues (i.e. gender equality, environmental protection).

Poland shows lower trust between parties and higher frequency of task and relationship conflicts, as well as a marked low impact of ERs on organizational issues compared to the European average.

Portuguese managers do not perceive ERs as trustworthy, cooperative or committed. This might be one of the explanations why their impact on different organizational issues is lower than the European average.

Spain shows comparable results to *Portugal*, except for the impact of ERs on organizational issues, where the scores are actually higher than in the rest of Europe, due to a large extent to a labor law that protects the ERs participation.

The United Kingdom shows mixed results, since there seems to be a climate of trust and managers perceive that negotiations are effective and result in high quality of agreements; however ERs are also perceived as being competitive in conflicts and not committed enough to the organization, when taking the European average as a point of reference.

This overview shows that factors as the trust perceived in the industrial relations, ERs' empowerment, ERs' commitment to the organization and frequency of conflict as well as the ERs' conflict management style vary significantly depending on the country.

Following the NEIRE model (Figure 5.1) we explore several of the relations between the factors in the model. We highlight here some main findings. We start with the outcomes, asking ourselves what factors contribute to the quality of agreements, and what determines the perceived impact of ERs on organizational issues? We then move to explore further the combinations of relational and task conflicts in each country, and cooperative and competitive conflict management by ERs, in the eyes of HR managers. We relate these to the other factors in our model, such as trust, competences and commitment, as well as the overall IR climate.

Quality of collective agreements in organizations

In study 2 of this dissertation, we already explored quality of agreements in depth, studying the relation between team conflicts and conflict behavior. Here we first look at the average scores by country. With no extreme differences between countries, it seems

that at the end of the day agreements are neither excellent nor terrible, as most countries score around 3 on a 1 to 5 scale (Figure 5.2). Evidently with this level of quality, there's still great room for improvement in all Europe, and this represents also a large variance between organizations in each country.

In addition to conflict and conflict behaviors, predictive for quality of agreements, we see that als ERs' level of competences is positively related to quality of agreements. This is in line with our first study (Garcia et al, 2017). Furthermore, and in line with the NEIRE model, we see that trusting industrial relations are closely related to the quality of the collective agreements (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Doney, Cannon & Mullen, 1998; Kramer, 1999; Kramer & Tyler, 1996). In contexts characterized by trust between ERs and management, better agreements are reached. the conflict efficacy and a constructive approach from both parties toward the conflict resolution, is related to quality outcomes in the agreements (Bacon & Blyton, 2007).

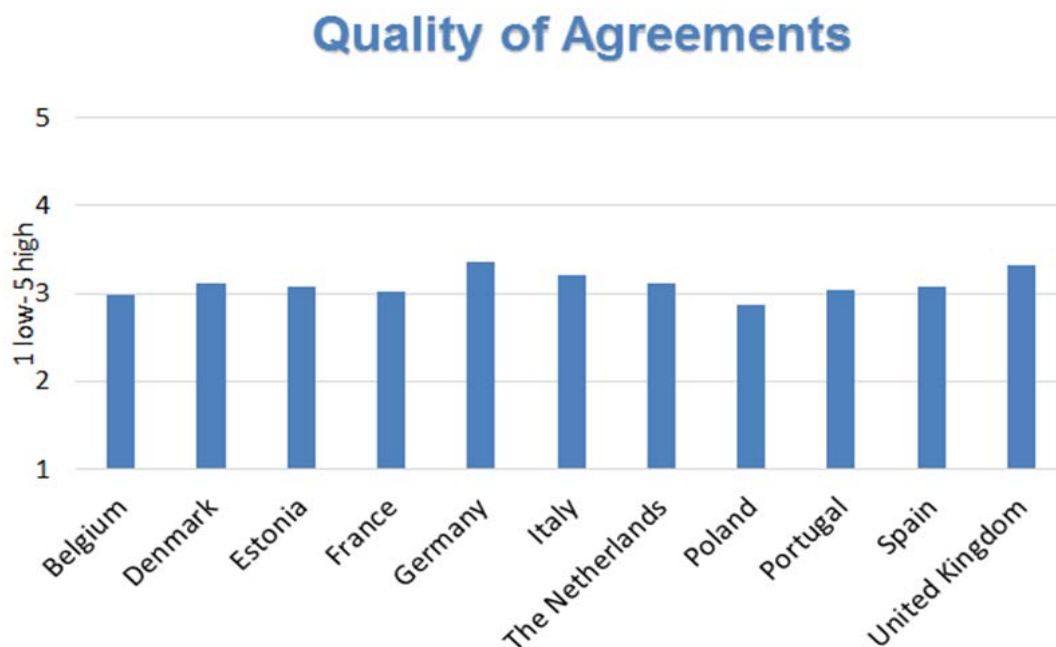


Figure 5.2. Perceived quality of collective agreements in organizations in 11 countries

Impact of ERs on traditional and innovative issues

In this chapter we use impact, to describe the influence ERs have on decision making in organizational issues. Impact is a term easily understood in the Industrial Relations field, although in the rest of this PhD we prefer to use 'influence'. We differentiate between traditional issues and innovative issues. Traditional issues being 'classic' collective bargaining topics, such as: working hours, pay and incentives systems and performance targets. Innovative issues: work-live balance, equality, corporate social responsibility and green issues (Cutcher-Gershenfeld & Kochan, 2004). The results show a relatively low score (under 3) for both types of impact overall in Europe.

However, when examining the scores in each country we see quite significant differences between countries. These are pictured in Figure 5.3.

The first thing that catches the eye is the position of Germany in the top right corner, indicating that German managers perceive ERs to have relatively strong impact on both types of issues. The strong position of German ERs matches with the co-determination which is present in Germany, and less so in other countries, as discussed in chapter 6 (Trinczek, 2006). On the other hand, Portugal scores low in both (bottom-left corner), meaning ERs here are perceived to have little impact on the decision making processes for traditional and innovative issues. Other countries such as The Netherlands and Denmark score considerably higher in innovative issues than in traditional issues.



Figure 5.3. Impact of ERs on innovative and traditional issues in 11 countries. (Original scales are from 1 to 5)

Following the NEIRE model, we explore how the impact on the decision making process is related to other factors as perceived competences and the conflict behavior used by the ERs. Less conflict frequency, and especially relational conflict, is related with more impact at the table. Furthermore, conflict management is related to the impact. Competitive conflict management by ERs is related to more impact on traditional issues; while ERs with more cooperative conflict management have more impact on innovative issues. The strongest factor however is perceived competence of ERs. Managers who perceive the ERs as competent, consider ERs' impact to be higher in the decision making process about traditional as well as innovative issues.

Integrity and Benevolence. These are perceived as relatively high in the European average however are surprisingly not related to the impact of ERs on decision

making. So, even though managers in Europe seem to believe that ERs have clear principles and are well intentioned, this doesn't appear to help them to impact more in the decisions. A quote of a Spanish manager illustrates this finding:

“The only good thing I can say about them [ERs] is that they are nice people” (....).

Frequency of conflicts between management and ERs

Substantial differences appear in the perceived frequency of conflicts between management and ERs (Figure 5.4). We differentiate relationship and task conflicts, the first being conflicts about values or interpersonal styles, while task conflicts refer to disagreements over distribution of resources, procedures and policies (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). As we can see, all countries score below 3 in relationship conflict and so is the case for most countries when referring to task conflict. France accounts for more conflicts of both types than the European average. Estonian managers perceive “calm” relations with ERs if we focus on the level of relationship conflict. In Belgium, the level of relationship conflict is also low, while the level of task conflict is one of the highest. Traditionally, research has concluded that relationship conflict can damage the organizational climate and the performance. Task conflict can sometimes be productive, however only in a cooperative context (De Wit, Greer & Jehn, 2012).

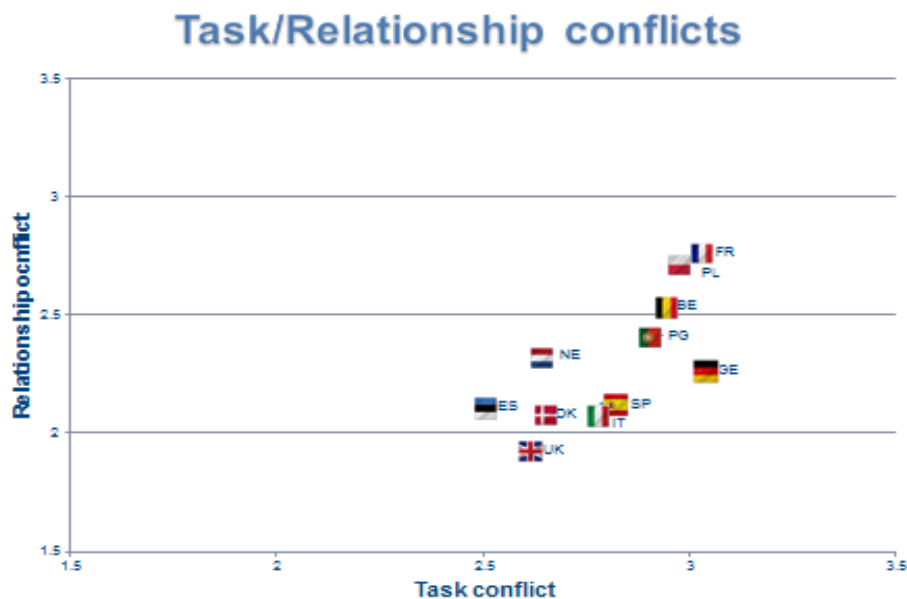


Figure 5.4. Task and relationship conflict in 11 countries. (Original scales are from 1 to 5)

Perceived conflict management by ERs

Figure 5.5 presents the HR managers' perceived conflict management style used by ERs. As mentioned above, ERs tend to combine cooperative and competitive styles

(Elgoibar, 2013; Euwema & Van Emmerik, 2007; Van de Vliert, Euwema & Huisman, 1995). This combination can include a more cooperative or competitive approach and here we appreciate differences between the countries (Munduate, Ganaza, Peiró & Euwema, 1999). For example, in Denmark, Germany and Estonia, ERs show a more cooperative pattern (relatively high on cooperation, and relatively low on competition), whereas in Belgium, the UK and Spain, ERs tend towards a more competitive pattern, with competitive behavior more prevalent than cooperative behavior.



Figure 5.5 Cooperative and competitive conflict management in 11 countries. (Original scales are from 1 to 5)

What determines cooperative and competitive behavior? Most important, we see that an IR climate of trust is strongly related to cooperative conflict management style, however, surprisingly not related with competitive conflict management by ERs. Two interviewees illustrate the effect that the industrial climate can have on the conflict management style:

‘In the traditional model of industrial relations there is no trust between the parties ... no ethics or transparency... and this is what is in crisis in the management of organizations’ (CEO, Spain).

‘We trust each other. It is the precondition of a close cooperation. I have 100 % trust in that they work well and are trustworthy, and that we can have talks off the record, where we think out loud together. It is also because I experience that they are modern, meaning that they don’t see us as their opponents, but merely as someone who works from a different perspective and have other assignments

than them. The main task is the same: We need to have a good, healthy, well-functioning workplace and we all work together so that our customers experience a good bank' (HR director, Germany).

5.4 Results Part 2: Ten practical recommendations and good practices

IR climates differ between countries, sectors and organizations. However, quite clear commonalities about desired practices also appear when we listen to HR managers in Europe. Here we summarize their wishes, concerns and some proposals to improve social dialogue. These good practices can be inspiring. HR managers and ERs can see in what ways these practices could be applied in their organization.

a) Promote innovative social dialogue

Following the NEIRE model, we start by examining the outcomes: effective dealing with conflicts, ERs' impact on decision making in organizations, and innovative collective agreements of high quality. By far most European employers prefer strong counterparts at the table. And they want to make high quality agreements that meet the changing developments in the workforce and economy. Employers value a formal structure for social dialogue to make such agreements, also within the organization. In the next points we explore the elements of the model regarding how to reach such empowered ERs, high quality agreements and minimal escalation of conflicts.

'We were able to really make an integrative agreement which is seen as very innovative in the context of our country. We could only do this due to the constructive climate and our joint efforts to cooperate. During this process, we were able to avoid personal conflicts' (HR manager, banking sector).

b) Make simple and flexible structures for social dialogue

From the practices gathered all around Europe, we see a wide variety at the structuring level. Most large and international organizations are well organized, and sometimes even over-structured. HR managers regularly express the wish for more comprehensive and less 'heavy' structures of employee representation. This however is not so for smaller companies, embedded in family and local businesses and organizations. Here, formal representation often is absent. Usually line management acts. In the case of the UK, also larger organizations heavily rely on informal ways of representation, which clearly have their limitations.

Generally, HR managers in Europe do value social dialogue as a form of structured negotiations and problem solving activities, also embedded in legal structures. When it comes to comprehensive models, HR managers prefer fewer parties at the table, representing different groups of employees and from different unions. Secondly, there is a tendency to have stronger ties with the ERs who also work in the

company, as compared with shop stewards who are employed by the unions. Related to that, in small companies where informal dialogue is working, the structure of ERs can be considered as less needed:

‘Simplifying the structure would be better. For example: if we are 49 we don’t need to have this structure but if we are 51 we need 10 members in the workers council!’ (HR Manager, France).

Good practice: A more flexible representation structure within the organizations is an attractive model for most HR managers. Efficient relationships are built more at an informal level than at a formal level.

c) Unions become more innovative and less ideological

Employers in most countries express appreciation for ERs. Nevertheless, there is a sense among employers that unions should be more adaptive to economic developments, also at organizational level. Unions, and from national and sectorial level, also in organizations, could improve the IR climate and their impact on decision making in organizations, if they are less conservative, in the eyes of employers.

The doctoral dissertation of Van der Brempt (2014), demonstrates this clearly. In case of WC members are in majority members of union with an ideology of traditional “class conflict”, ERs are perceived as less impactful, and less cooperative, also by the ERs themselves. More impact is perceived when members are in unions with a stronger focus on cooperation with employers.

ERs are expected to fight for the interests of the employees; however this is not necessarily in conflict with the interests of the company. This indeed is the perception of most employers, who expect that unions would also take that perspective and that they would consequentially educate ERs in this way. Within Europe, ERs in Germany are perceived to have a relatively high impact. A German manager illustrates this:

‘Traditionally industrial relations can be characterized as constructive, a desire to work together, and I think that 99% of my colleagues and 99% of the workers would back me up on this’.

Good practice: take a constructive and innovative approach towards conflict.

d) Invest in social dialogue

Many employers see the relevance of a structural representation, and invest substantially in realizing this. Paying the part time and full time working hours for representatives, and having staff and facilities at the human resources department engaged in the social dialogue and structural negotiations. Most see this as money well spent, although quite a few feel there could be more efficiency in the formal structures. Investing in social

dialogue in diverse ways pays off, particularly when this is framed in a cooperative relation.

‘The role of the ER is important in our organization; we need them to reach good agreements with our employees and trust that they put their best intentions into doing just that’ (HR director, education sector).

‘Social dialogue has to focus on the ‘weakest group’ in terms of explanations and therefore, a sound didactic approach is required. It is not per se the workers who need such explanations – for instance, if it is about a technical problem in our production, then the employees and managers are in need of clarification. So it depends very much on the topic we talk about’ (HR manager, industry).

Good practice: Promote social dialogue and involve different groups of workers depending on the topic on the bargaining agenda:

e) Invest in informal relations

Within each country we see clear differences between organizations, and between sectors. Even though the financial sector has faced dramatic changes, the IR climate is relatively cooperative, compared with industry. Higher education is also more cooperative compared to the industrial sector, generally speaking. How to promote a cooperative industrial relations climate in the organization? A key factor mentioned by many HR managers is to develop good and task-focused informal relations.

In Belgium, Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands, management widely uses informal communication prior to officially starting to negotiate in order to circumvent the ‘heavy’ structures and come up with possible solutions beforehand.

‘In informal meetings, employee representatives are more likely to show understanding for topics that would be very difficult to put on the table in formal meetings’.

‘Our informal relationship is certainly better than the formal one. Therefore, I try to actively engage in these informal relationships with the employee representatives as I am convinced that in the long-run, this will also enhance our formal relationship’.

Good practice: invest in informal relations.

f) Build trust

Trust is recognized as key in the relation between management and ERs. Also, clearly trust is regularly lacking, and managers regularly believe that ERs don’t trust them. Trust mostly grows slowly and is associated with long tenures of ERs. Generally, employers manifest the need to be transparent and to promote open communication, together with sensitivity towards employees. Managers refer once again to the need for training to be able to communicate more effectively with ERs about different and complex topics related to organizational dynamics and therefore improve trust between the parties. Some companies report that they carry out a team activity for both

management and ERs once a year in order to improve the relationship and establish trust.

‘In order to keep good and trustworthy social relations, we – management and employee representatives together – go on a trip once a year, e.g. to visit one of our plants abroad. For us, it is important to view employee representatives not only in their function, but also as human beings with a personal background’ (HR manager, Belgium).

‘Generally speaking the relations between management and ERs are very cooperative. We respect each other’s position and share open information’ (HR manager, Denmark).

Good practice: share information and involve ERs in decision making process.

g) Develop competencies of ERs

There is a general opinion among employers on the need to professionalize the ERs role and training on technical competencies. The ideological orientation that shapes the profile of ERs in many European countries, such as Spain, is characterized by class struggle and confrontation with management. In this regard, employers point out that it’s important to make the role attractive to competent people, including those who are younger and have a more flexible attitude.

Training ERs is regularly seen as responsibility of unions. However, this is sometimes used as excuse for not investing in training by companies. We have seen good practices where employers work together with unions, under the umbrella of unions, respecting their independent role. And in addition also invest in company provided or facilitated training for works councils.

‘In our company we invest in the training of our ERs, we believe that we achieve more innovative and higher quality agreements if we negotiate with competent ERs’ (HR manager, Belgium).

‘The company should provide ERs with training as soon as they got elected’ (HR manager, France).

‘Training in subjects like business management, finance and negotiation skills can give ERs more tools to work with and make them more flexible’ (HR manager, Spain).

Good practice: Increase and improve the training for ERs, especially in subjects such as business management and economy and training to improve their communication and negotiation skills. Apart from upgrading their competencies, a more open attitude when negotiating could result from this specialized training.

h) Increase attractiveness of the role of ER

Many HR directors express concern about the recruitment of competent and motivated ERs. And employers are searching for ways to promote competent, young employees to engage as ER. Interesting options of good practices are mentioned such as:

- Reward the role of ER, as part of career management (you cannot become manager unless you have served as ER);
- Promote adequate remuneration, especially in large organizations.
- Don't necessarily limit the wages at the level of entry, when ERs start.
- Involve ERs for shorter periods or specific project assignments, instead of long year commitment

'The problem is that TU don't have successors and highly qualified potential leaders to substitute current ERs'

Good practice: Make the role of ER attractive for young and diverse talent in the organization as part of their career.

i) Contribute to willingness to change

In terms of attitudes, the HR management particularly desires a higher degree of openness towards change. A number of HR managers describe attitudes as rigid. This is perceived as a problem, especially due to the fact that most of the investigated companies are situated in a highly dynamic environment with constant changes, e.g. in terms of competition. In the view of the HR management, the continuous need to adapt to the external environment can hardly be aligned with the current attitudes of ERs. However, management generally does not want to take responsibility in this regard, e.g. by offering trainings.

In addition, management can contribute to willingness to change by involving ERs early in the process, informing them well, and empower them.

An HR manager of a university:

'Training and education for employee representatives is provided by the university. We also take time to regularly clarify difficult files in order to empower them to take decisions. However, this is a tricky issue. It requires a trustworthy climate, otherwise it is perceived as manipulation'.

Good practice: providing training and high education.

j) Promote constructive conflict management

Promoting a constructive management of conflicts is seen as a need by many HR managers. Employers can contribute to that. For example, several of the investigated companies use working groups consisting of employer and ERs to overcome potential conflicts prior to negotiations. Moreover, members of the working groups are mostly

selected based on expertise, which means that everyone on the table should in principle have sound knowledge about the topic. This arguably facilitates discussions and probably, leads to good outcomes. Results show that adding employees with expertise to workgroups is a good practice to achieve more constructive and innovative social dialogue.

‘The ERs should have the function of a co-manager, together with management it should be concerned with finding the best solution for the company and therefore WC members need to be orally competent, they need to understand financially how the company works. They need to possess all the competencies required of a co-manager so that they are on the same level as the top management’ (.....).

Several HR managers refer explicitly to ‘national action days’, which are seen as a burden, since the workforce normally, participates although there is not necessarily a link to the company. HR managers would like to see more innovative and creative solutions in this respect. According to the HR management, there are ways to avoid participating in such national action days and it is important to find solutions to do so. An HR manager reports:

‘Taking part in national action days means high costs for us, although the strike is mostly not related to the company at all. This should be evitable and we proved twice that it can work. However, we had to engage in concession bargaining and that is unhealthy’.

Good practice: train ERs as well as HR managers in principled negotiation, so that both parties focus on exploring the interests instead of staying in the positions. Actions days are not beneficial for managers (the company lose) neither for workers (the worker lose). Therefore, working together on creative solutions that satisfy both parties is a more beneficial alternative. In that, trust and competences are essential at the negotiation table. One hand, trust facilitates information sharing; on the other hand, competences make it possible for ERs to understand the task and the decision to be made.

5.5 Discussion and conclusion

There’s no doubt that most European employers recognize the need of constructive social dialogue. They are generally aware of the importance of the role played by ERs and they express the need and wish to work with strong and competent social partners. The negative side of the story is that in general, European managers don’t think ERs are up to their desired standards in certain aspects. For example, managers of many of the participating countries believed that ERs lack key competences, such as financial expertise and organizational change. Also, the impact of ERs in the decision making processes of European organizations is seen as rather poor. Furthermore, numerous managers from different countries expressed that ERs represent less and less of the

workforce as a whole, rather being more interested in representing individuals separately and especially backing up the interests of the trade union they are part of. Related to this, it was common that managers would express more problems with external unions than with the actual WC and ERs within the organization. Nevertheless, ERs are regarded as quite cooperative when looking at the big European picture.

It should be noted that there are major differences between countries according to the results. We can see more positive results in the Nordic countries (e.g. Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany) and in general those countries that are not so affected by the crisis. In contrast, the countries in the south show more competitive relationship patterns (e.g.: Spain, Portugal, France and Italy). However, clear commonalities can be observed if we focus on the good practices suggested by HR managers.

Altogether, employers prefer to negotiate with their own employees, meaning they would appreciate further decentralization. As pointed out before, they want ERs to have an important role in the decision making processes and they would like them to have more impact over the issues discussed inside the organization. Notwithstanding, this would require ERs to show a proactive attitude and offering innovative and interesting proposals. Many managers share the perception of ERs being inflexible and showing a confrontational attitude. This also requires skilled and informed ERs. Employers express a desire to work with open minded ERs who are competent and able to think in a strategic way. Additionally, managers state that another requirement would be for ERs to show stronger cohesion among themselves. Conflicts between ERs and the trade unions also don't help towards the impact of ERs on organizational issues, according to managers.

Employers in Europe also share the belief that trust is essential for creating constructive social dialogue, yet the overall situation points out to a lack of trust between social partners in a great number of contexts. Frequently, managers pointed out that the complex structure of employee representation doesn't help in this sense and they believe a more simple structure would facilitate cooperative relations.

To conclude, this study offers a deep exploration about HR managers' perceptions on the role of ERs. Different perceptions of competences of ERs, trust between parties, and perceived commitment to the organization. These factors impact the amount and type of task and relationship conflicts they have to face. And we have seen that the conflict behavior by ERs are related to either poorer or better quality of agreements and impact of ERs on decision making. The proposals from HR managers in each country are listed in order to improve social dialogue practices, leading towards more and more efficient participation by ERs in the decision making processes of organizations, as well as towards a higher quality of agreements. Developing cooperative relations between management and ERs includes mutual empowerment. Doing so, parties together can build a Tower of Power, in which decisions taken, optimally meet the interests of all parties. Participants in our study testify that indeed a strong partnership between management and ERs can be such a powerhouse, with high

quality of social dialogue. So, we promote to work on an organizational Tower of Power, as the healthiest and fairest way to make decisions in a democratic organizational context.

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Chapter 6. Discussion and Conclusions

6.1 The importance of quality of agreements and conflict management

Alitalia Employees Reject ‘Last Chance’ Restructuring Plan by Vote – Looming Liquidation and Grounding of The Airline¹¹

Alitalia employees were called upon to cast a historic vote concerning the future of their employer but the vote resulted in a drastic rejection of the restructuring plan widely seen as the airlines last chance. Management and trade unions worked out the plan to restructure Alitalia (again) and attempt to turn the airlines bad fortunes around by cutting wages and laying off employees. The unions however also pushed for the criteria that this plan has to be sanctioned by Alitalia employees through a vote which was a controversial decision and as it turned out did very little to resolve the situation of the loss-making carrier which is now facing a grounding as Italy’s political leadership has made clear there would be no involvement of the government in any way and there is ‘No Plan B’ for Alitalia.

This PhD is about how to gain quality of negotiated agreements in organizations and increase the influence of ERs in decision making processes. Where employee representatives and management face conflictive issues, often with high stakes for all parties involved and strong emotions. In the example of Alitalia, we see a dramatic moment in the downfall of this once-famous airline. The quality of agreement made here, apparently was poor, not supported by the employees, and a step towards the end of the organization and loss of thousands of jobs. Indeed, at May 2nd, 2017, Alitalia filed for bankruptcy¹². This example underscores the vital importance of the issues we investigate in this PhD. Key questions, such as: what was the role of the ERs in these negotiations and in communications within the company? Were the union representatives and ERs competent, and perceived as such by management? What was the climate in the organization, and what conflicts did appear between the social

¹¹ <http://loyaltylobby.com/2017/04/25/alitalia-employees-reject-last-chance-restructuring-plan-by-vote-loomng-liquidation-and-grounding-of-the-airline/>

¹² <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-05-02/alitalia-starts-bankruptcy-proceedings-after-turnaround-fails>

partners at the negotiation table, and to what extent was the conflict behavior by ERs competitive and cooperative?

In this final chapter, we will first summarize our main findings, and then discuss more generally the theoretical and practical implications of our work. As a guidance for our work, we developed a heuristic model, which we introduced in our first chapter, and present below once more (Figure 6.1).

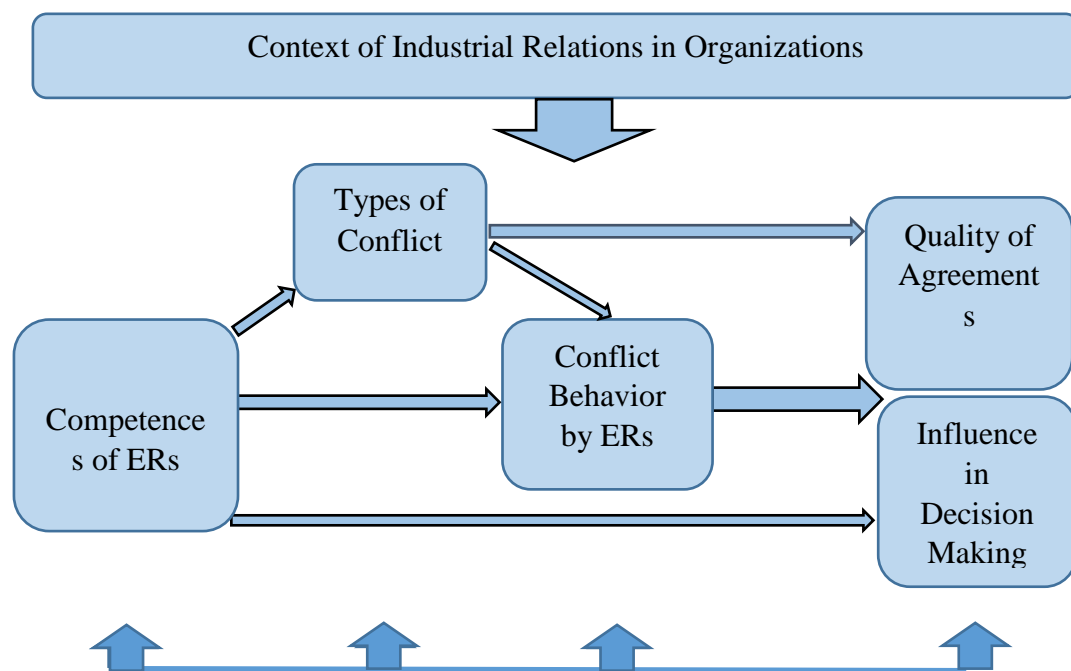


Figure 6.1. Heuristic model of the key variables in the dissertation

6.2 Conflict behavior by employee representatives: Main findings

We started this doctorate with a systematic literature review, focusing on conflict management at organizational level, between the industrial partners. We also included trust as a key variable linked with the way parties behave in organizational conflicts. Nevertheless, we found only a very limited number of studies, particularly when we focus on quantitative studies. Investigating the literature from the past 20 years, we found five papers addressing conflict management, and another 10 papers combining trust and conflict behavior, representing 14 unique studies. To give this some perspective, we compare this number with studies on team conflict in organizations. De Wit et al (2012) included in their review 116 unique empirical studies investigating the

relationship between task and relationship conflict and specific team outcomes. So, we have to conclude conflict management at organizational level, and particularly conflict between management and employee representatives, is an understudied issue in academic literature. Specially when it comes to quantitative measures. This outcome is not without meaning. Collective organizational conflicts have major impact worldwide, and the behaviors of the primary parties, both management and ERs, are hardly investigated. Neither do we have a good insight in antecedents of these behaviors, the interactions, and the effects of behaviors at this level. With this study, we contribute to a better understanding of the conflict behavior of ERs as well as their competences as perceived by the managers, as well as some of the antecedents and consequences. Furthermore, we offer a theoretical model to analyze these behaviors, the theory of conglomerate conflict behavior.

In our second study, we empirically investigated the relationship between perceived competences, conflict behavior and influence on decision making. An important feature of this study being the participants. We investigated the perspective of employers. How does 'the other side of the table', perceive and evaluate their counterparts, that is ERs. This study among 614 HR managers from 11 European countries demonstrates that –as expected- perceived competence of ERs is directly related to their perceived influence on decision making. Furthermore, this relation is partly mediated by the conflict behavior of ERs. Three important findings are worth mentioning here. Firstly, perceived competences are positively related to cooperative conflict behavior, however negatively related to competitive conflict behavior. Secondly, cooperative and competitive behavior should best be considered as a conglomerate conflict behavior, where both contribute positively to influence on decision making. And finally, the issues at the table matter. Our study shows that the perceived influence of ERs is somewhat larger on innovative issues, compared to traditional issues. Perceived competences of ERs are strongly related to this perceived influence, both for traditional and innovative issues. Furthermore, competitive behavior appears more related to influence on traditional issues, whereas cooperative behavior is more related to influence on innovative issues. Another important outcome of this study is the relation of the conglomerate conflict behavior with influence. When cooperative and competitive behavior are taken into account simultaneously, we see both behaviors relate positively to influence in decision making.

In our third study we investigated the relation between types of conflict, conflict behavior and quality of negotiated agreements. We used again data from 614 HR managers from 11 European countries. A first interesting outcome of this study is that task and relationship conflict are strongly positively related. Second, we see that task conflict has a stronger negative relation with quality of agreements, compared to relationship conflict. Thirdly, this relation is partly mediated by conflict behavior, with cooperative and competitive conflict behavior both positively related to quality of agreement. This again is supporting the theory of conglomerate conflict behavior.

With our fourth study we took a broader perspective, exploring the perceptions and expectations of the managers towards ER, on a broader range of issues. We started of using the dataset collected from 614 HR managers in 11 European countries. We complemented this with a summary of the interviews with 110 of these managers. These typically were senior management, acting at the executive level of their organization. In this chapter we focus mostly on the expectations, good practices and suggestions by these managers to improve social dialogue at organizational level. Most managers see the benefits of a well structured social dialogue, and offer many ideas to improve the quality of this dialogue, developing this into a shared power-house.

6.3 Theoretical implications

The outcomes of our studies have several theoretical implications. First, this study is to our knowledge, unique in presenting data of a large sample of European HR managers on their perception of attitudes, competences, (conflict) behaviors and influence of ERs. The measures offer a possible benchmark for further studies in understanding the influence of ERs in decision making in organizations, and the perceptions of their competences and conflict behaviors.

Furthermore, we developed several scales, tailored for this specific context. The measures on ER's competences, cooperative and competitive conflict behaviors, influence on decision making on traditional and innovative issues, and quality of decision making, all appeared to have good reliabilities. As we observed in our review study, empirical studies are scarce in this area, and particularly quantitative and comparative studies are few. The measurements developed as part of this PhD, can

contribute to further academic research in this domain, offering qualitative and comparable data.

We would like to highlight four more theoretical contributions of this PhD.

Influence on Decision Making Processes

ERs serve as a bridge between managers and their co-workers, representing a key element of social dialogue. Traditionally, in Europe social dialogue is strong, compared to other parts of the world. However, even in Europe, ERs have been losing influence in the recent years and this is even more obvious in certain countries (Molina & Miguelez, 2013; Richardson, Danford, Stewart, & Pulignano, 2010;). How much do ERs participate in the decision making in European organizations? Gaining impact is closely related to the labor legislation in each country (Mueller & Stegmaier, 2017). However, at the organizational level the motivation and competencies of the ERs and the attitudes of the employers play a main role in determining ERs' power and influence (Elgoibar, Munduate & Euwema, 2012; Glassner, Keune & Marginson, 2011; Markey et al, 2013; Markey & Townsend, 2013). Our studies show that perceived competences and conflict behavior by ERs are strongly related to the influence of ERs in organizational decision making.

An innovative aspect of this work is the differentiation between influence on traditional issues and on innovative issues. Traditional issues being 'classic' collective bargaining topics, such as working hours, pay and incentives systems and performance targets. Innovative issues are for example work-life balance, equality, corporate social responsibility and green issues. Our study is the first to our knowledge investigating the relations between competences, conflict behaviors and the influence on these different types of issues. For theories on industrial relations, differentiating the types of issues on which ERs have influence, surely is relevant. Relating this to the conflict behaviors, is a relatively unexplored area. Our second study showed that competitive conflict behavior is more related to influence on traditional issues, while cooperative conflict behavior is more related to influence on innovative issues. An underlying, explaining mechanism might be, that traditional issues are more distributive, for example financial payment. Whereas innovative issues, such as inclusive HR or green issues, might be more integrative by nature. Future studies should further explore these relations.

Perceived Competences of ERs

Managers who perceive the ERs as competent, consider ERs' impact to be higher in the decision-making process about traditional as well as innovative issues. This is a clear outcome of our second study (Garcia et al., 2017). And confirmed also in our qualitative work. ERs' competences however are not perceived as very high by HR managers (Euwema et al, 2015). Also, the self-perceived competence of ERs differ depending on the context (Munduate et al, 2012).

Our study shows that perceived competences are highly related to perceived influence of ERs and to quality of agreements. This is in line with studies on the potential organizational benefits of works councils (Addison, 2005; VandenBerg et al, 2011). However, we also noted that perceived competences are strongly positively related with cooperative conflict behavior by ERs, and negatively with competitive conflict behavior. This outcome contributes to our understanding of perceptions of general competences in relation to conflict behaviors. Even though the counterpart might perceive the need for competitive behaviors by ERs, such behavior is easily perceived as less competent (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). Investing in the relation contributes to a more positive perception of these competences.

We believe this is a fruitful line for further investigations, exploring more in depth the relation between investment in ERs competences, and the quality of relations and agreements.

Task and Relationship Conflict

Task and relationship conflict in teams have received extensive attention in recent research (Guerra et al, 2005; Medina et al, 2005). We already mentioned the 116 empirical studies included in the most recent review (De Wit et al, 2012), and research related to these constructs continue (Jimmieson, Tucker, & Campbell, 2017; Sinha et al, 2016). Our study adds to this fruitful line of research in two ways. Our study is –to our knowledge- the first using the framework of task and relationship conflict in teams in the context of industrial relations in organizations. We have to notice, that the relations between management and ERs are of specific nature, and are rarely studied as intragroup conflict, although in several countries the CEO is the formal chair of the

works council, and therefore even in the organizational structure the negotiations take place within a team composed of management and ERs (Van der Brempt, Boone, van Witteloostuijn, & Van den Berg, 2017). Our study shows, that the concepts of task and relationship conflict are meaningful and relevant when investigating negotiations between management and ERs. Furthermore, we notice a strong positive relation between the two types of conflict, and the types of conflict are related with conflict behavior and different team outcomes (see chapter 4). Future research is needed to understand better the conditions under which task and relationship conflict in industrial relations develop, and can be reduced. Also, more recent types of conflict might help to gain a deeper understanding of the conflict dynamics. Particularly process conflict (O'Neill, Allen, & Hastings, 2013), and status conflict (Bendersky & Hays, 2012) might be relevant, as this is closely related to issues of power and trust, which easily come at play in the dynamics between management and ERs, as was discussed in different chapters in this dissertation.

Conglomerate Conflict Behavior by ERs

Our two empirical studies focus on the conflict behaviors by ERs, as perceived by HR managers, their counterpart in the social dialogue in organizations. This is a next step in a series of studies to investigate conglomerate conflict behavior. A first interesting notion relates to the issue of 'who is assessing the conflict behavior'. In our study, the HR managers see a clear *negative* relation between cooperative and competitive conflict behavior by ERs (-.41; see chapters 3 and 4 of this dissertation). This is in clear contrast with the self-perception of ERs. Elgoibar (2013) concludes based on a self-reported study of conflict behavior by ERs: "*According to the conflict pattern, this study concludes that forcing and integrating are positively correlated for ERs. This is consistent with the CCB theory (Van de Vliert et al.,1995). This theory states that the combination of behaviors is explained by the mixed-motive situations in conflict.*" (Elgoibar,2013, p.41). So, we see that ERs themselves perceive their competitive (forcing) behavior, and integrative (problem solving) behavior as positively related, while HR managers perceive a negative relationship between cooperative and competitive behaviors. Although the measures in both studies are somewhat different, it is important to further understand conglomerate conflict behavior from different

perspectives: the self-perception clearly differs from the perception of the counterpart. In most tests of conflict instruments, this perspective is not taken into account. For industrial relations, it is without doubt highly relevant. Both in understanding how conglomerate conflict behavior is perceived by the actor, as by others, might relate to different outcomes. Investigations towards the combination of these perspectives seems a natural next step in research.

Clearly, the previous statements that cooperative and competitive conflict behaviors are positively related in conglomerate behavior, should be subject to further investigation. Our assumption would be, that in the eye of the beholder there might be a positive relation, while in the eye of the other party, the same behavior might be perceived as contrasting.

6.4 Practical implications

Data from this study concludes that European employers prefer strong counterparts at the table (García et al, 2015; chapter 5 in this PhD). And they want to make high quality agreements that meet the changing developments in the workforce and economy. Employers value a formal structure for social dialogue to make such agreements, also within the organization (Garcia et al, 2015). In the next points, we use our model to highlight interventions to improve constructive conflict management and quality of decision making in organizations.

Developing Competencies of ERs

Perceived competences are closely related to conflicts, conflict behavior, influence of ERs and the quality of decision making. Therefore, investing in competences of ERs is of great interest, both for unions, ERs, and for employers. There is a general opinion among employers on the need to professionalize the ERs role and the development of both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ skills. Employers have pointed out that it’s important to make the role attractive to competent people, including those who are young and have a more flexible attitude (Euwema et al, 2015). Investing in the recruitment of competent ERs and the continuous development of competences is a joint interest, and therefore also might be a shared point of action. Employers and unions can team up in this respect. And also at organizational level, management and ERs could invest in cooperative

learning (Garcia et al, 2015). This will not only lead to an increase in competences, however also contributes to mutual understanding, less fault lines between management and ERs (Van der Brempt, 2014), and more cooperative relations.

Differentiating Task and Relationship Conflicts

In our studies, we observed that task and relationship conflict are strongly positively related. As mentioned in chapter 4, it is an essential skill for negotiators, to differentiate between task and relationship conflict. Knowing and recognizing the differences, and dealing with relationship issues in different ways from task conflicts, are important competences, however not easy to develop. Particularly not, when parties are also personally involved, as in the case of ERs. They have a double role, representing the interests of their co-workers, however also have personal interests, and are expected to take the interest of the company also into consideration. Task conflict easily provokes relationship conflict, particularly for people with low self-control (Jimmieson et al, 2017). Interventions can therefore also be directed at the selection of spokespersons, who are capable of differentiating task and relationship conflicts. This might help to also reduce the negative relation between inevitable task conflicts and quality of decision making.

Promoting Constructive Conflict Behavior

Central to our study is conflict behavior. We have demonstrated that competitive and cooperative conflict behaviors both contribute positively to influence of ERs and to quality of decision making. However, we also have seen that competitive conflict behavior by ERs is perceived mostly negative (less competent) by HR managers. Important to notice furthermore, is that the positive effects of competitive behavior only become visible, when this is seen as part of a conglomerate conflict behavior, where also cooperative behavior is present. More so, cooperative conflict behavior contributes by far more to positive outcomes, compared to competitive behavior. This implicates that both parties, employers and ERs, could benefit from the development of such conglomerate conflict behavior, learning to combine cooperative behavior with competitive aspects, both in time (sequentially), and at the same time (simultaneously). How and when to use what behaviors, is an advanced skill, and highly dependent of the context, conflict issues at stake and personal relations. Therefore, training in this matter

need to be contextualized, and can contribute to gain more influence and better outcomes.

Focus on Quality of Decision Making through Influence of ERs

In our model, we focus on two related outcomes: the influence of ERs on decision making, and the quality of decision making. Our studies show that competences of ERs are an important driver of both outcomes, preventing conflicts, and contributing to constructive conflict behaviors. This is related, as we have seen, to the conflict issues at stake (traditional or innovative).

The practical implication of this, is for both ERs and management, to start at the end: what types of decisions need to be made, and how important is the influence of ERs on this decision? Based on this assessment, both parties can bring in the needed expertise, to come to an optimal decision making process. Though this might sound naïve, given the often-conflictive relations, this practice is what we have seen in several of the organizations we investigated. These companies use working groups consisting of the most relevant managers (with expertise) and ERs to solve potential conflicts prior to negotiations. Members of such working groups are typically selected based on their expertise, which means that everyone on the table should in principle have sound knowledge about the topic. This arguably facilitates discussions and contributes to quality of decision making (García et al, 2015). Adding employees with expertise to workgroups is a good practice to achieve more constructive and innovative social dialogue.

6.5 Conclusion

This dissertation is about conflict in organizations, how ERs cope with these conflicts and what the effects of this behavior are. We illustrated this with cases from the airline industry. A turbulent sector, where industrial relations are under constant pressure, and change is ongoing. The quality of decision making and their influence in the decisions depends on the competences of the people representing both management and employees, as well as on their conflict behavior. I hope this work contributes to a better understanding of conflict dynamics, its antecedents and consequences. Key issues for the future of work of many employees. They deserve competent representatives. And

competent representatives deserve influence in organizational decision making. I believe this is the best road, to serve the interests of all impacted by these decisions.

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Academic CV

Short biography

Ana Belén García is a PhD candidate at the University of Seville (US) and KU Leuven. Her focus is on conflict management in organizations in the context of European innovative labor relations. After studying Psychology at the US, she obtained her Master in Work and Organizational Psychology through the Double degree of Maastricht University & the University of Seville. She is also a registered mediator.

Research projects

She was member of the coordination team of two European research projects on industrial relations, social dialogue and the position of employee representatives (NEIRE I & NEIRE II), from 2012 to 2016, working at KU Leuven (Belgium).

NEIRE I:

New European industrial relations (NEIRE): Empowering employee representatives to negotiate flexible, fair and innovative labour relations.

European Commission. Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

Reference: VS/2010/0376.

Coordination: Lourdes Munduate. University of Seville, Spain.

NEIRE II:

New European industrial relations (NEIRE): Expectations of employers on employee representatives' roles, attitudes and competencies to act as partners in social innovation.

European Commission. Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.

Reference: VS/2012/041.

Coordination: Martin Euwema. KU Leuven, Belgium.

Currently she is member of the coordination team of a European project on mediation in collective organizational conflicts (NEIRE III), working at the university of Seville. The publication based on this project will be in 2018.

NEIRE III:

New European industrial relations (NEIRE): Mediation system effectiveness for collective organizational conflicts: A comparative study in Europe.

European Commission. Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

Reference: VP/2015/004.

Coordination: Martin Euwema. KU Leuven, Belgium.

Scientific Publications

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- García, A. B., Munduate, L., Elgoibar, P., Wendt, H., & Euwema, M. (2017). Competent or Competitive? How employee representatives gain influence in organizational decision-making. *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research*, 10(2), 107-125.
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- Pender, E., Elgoibar, P., García, A.B., Munduate, L., & Euwema, M., (2017). Improving social dialogue. What employers expect from employee representatives. *The Economic and Labour Relations Review* (in press).

Presentations at Scientific Conferences

Types of conflict, conflict behavior and quality of negotiated agreements in organizations. Presentation at the congress Innovation, entrepreneurship, and the development of family business in China, Beijing Institute of Technology (BIT University), Beijing (China). April 13th, 2017.

Elgoibar, Euwema, Garcia, E.,& Pender, E. (2016). "Building trust and constructive conflict management in organizations: the role of Employee representatives" *Workshop*

organized at the 11th ILERA European Congress, Economics Faculty, Milán (Italy). 8-10 Sept 2016.

Garcia, E., Munduate, L., Euwema, M., & Elgoibar, P. (2016). *Task and relationship conflict in social dialogue and quality of agreements. The mediating role of conflict behavior by Employee representatives*. Presentation at the 11th ILERA European Congress, Economics Faculty, Milán (Italy). 8-10 Sept 2016.

García, A.B., Euwema, M., Munduate, L., & Elgoibar, P. (2016). Representatives' conflict behavior and quality of agreements. The mediating role of task and relationship conflict. Paper presented at the *International Association of Conflict Management conference (IACM)* Columbia University. New York (USA), June 2016.

Presentation at the International Association of Conflict Management conference (IACM) of the paper: *Competences and Conflict Behavior promoting the Impact of Employee Representatives in Organizational Decision Making* (A. García, L. Munduate, P. Elgoibar, H. Wendt and M. Euwema). Clear water Beach, Florida, USA. 2015

* Awarded by the International Association of Conflict Management (IACM)'s conference.

Presentation in the 28th International congress of Applied Psychology of the paper: *Competences and conflict behaviour promoting the Impact of ERs in organizational decision making*. Paris, France. 8-13 July 2014.

Pender, E., García, A., & Elgoibar, P., (2013). *Who do we want at the table? Innovative Social Dialogue in Europe: Results from the project*. Presentación en el Simposio "Who do we want at the table? New forms of social dialogue in Europe". BNP Paribas headquarters, Brussels, Belgium. 27th November 2013.

Grants & Awards

Research visit grant from Tsinghua University. April 2017.

DRRC Student Conference Scholarship for the 28th Annual IACM Conference. Clearwater Beach, Florida (USA). June 28th to July 1st 2015.

Grant for the Double degree MSc in Work and Organizational Psychology (University of Maastricht and University of Seville). 2015 - 2016

Other presentations and professional activities

2016: Workshop promoting social dialogue, HR Country directors, BNP Europe, Madrid (Spain).

2015: Co-organiser of the international symposium social dialogue, EC and BNP Paribas, Paris (France).

2014: Co-organiser of the international symposium social dialogue, EC and BNP Paribas Fortis, Brussels (Belgium).

Appendixes

Appendix 1. Scale items for Perceived Competences. Munduate et al. (2012).

To what extent do you believe that employee representatives are competent in?

Item 1. Human Resources Management

Item 2. Establishing and maintaining relationships
with management

Item 3. Labor law

Item 4. Social skills

Item 5. Business and management

Item 6. Negotiation and conflict management

Item 7. Organizational change and
business mergers

Item 8. Stress management

Item 9. Managing complex information (on strategy and change)

Likert scale from:

1 = *Very low*, 2 = *Somewhat*, 3 = *Reasonable*, 4 = *Good*, 5 = *Excellent*.

Appendix 2. English Survey



NEIRE SURVEY

FEBRUARY 2013

This survey is part of a European project promoting social innovations in organizations in 11 countries.

This questionnaire for HRM directors and managers, focuses on your experiences with and expectations of employee representatives in your organization. Please mark the answer representing best your opinion. Your answers are completely confidential. You can contact us at: NEIREstudy@gmail.com

You and your Organization

1. What is your position in your organization?
HRM Director (responsible for all HR activities, directly reporting at the board)
HRM Manager (reporting at management and at HR director)
HR internal advisor for labor relations
Line management
Other:
2. What is the name of your organization? (OPTIONAL)
3. My organization has branches
National
European
Global
4. How is the organization doing in 2012-2013?
Organization is growing
Organization is stable
Organization is downsizing
5. How many employees are working for you organization (nationally)?
6. Since how long are you working actively with employee representatives?
7. How much of your working time are you involved in contacts with employee representatives and unions? %
8. Your gender ☐ Male ☐ Female
9. Your age

How would you characterize the relation between management and employee representatives in your organization?

1	2	3	4	5
None				A very great deal

To what extent is there a trusting relation between management and employee representatives?

To what extent is there a constructive dialogue between management and the employee representatives?

To what extent do employee representatives and management distrust each other?

How often do management and employee representatives disagree?

To what extent do management and employee representatives disagree about the content of strategic decisions?

How frequently are there disagreements about ideas between management and employee representatives?

How much *personal friction* is there between management and employee representatives?

How much *personality clashes* are there between management and employee representatives?

How much *tension* is there between management and employee representatives?

How do you perceive the ability, benevolence, and integrity of employee representatives in your company?

1	2	3	4	5
I totally disagree	I disagree	Neutral	I agree	I totally agree

Employee representatives are capable of performing their job as representatives.

Employee representatives are well qualified to perform their role as representatives.

Employee representatives look out for what is important for the organization.

Employee representatives would not do anything (deliberately) to hurt the organization.

Employee representatives have a sense of justice.

Employee representatives will stick to their word.

I support employee representatives to have influence over issues that are important to the organization.

I prefer to keep an eye on what the employee representatives are doing.

I see large differences between the employee representatives in my organization in terms of competencies and attitudes.

To what extent do employee representatives have impact in your organization on the following subjects?

1	2	3	4	5
No impact	Little impact	Some impact	Substantial impact	Strong impact

Working hours (hours per week, daily working hours, schedule, leave)
 Pay and incentives (salary, pay increase)
 Performance targets (performance level, quantity and quality of employees' work)
 Training and career development (education, personal development plan)
 Health and safety
 Work-Live balance
 Equality Issues
 Corporate Social Responsibility
 Green issues

What is the attitude and style of operation by employee representatives in your organisation?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Sometimes	Regularly	Often	Always

Employee representatives....

- encourage a "we are in it together" attitude.
- seek a solution that will be good for both employees and employer.
- treat conflict as a mutual problem of both employer and employees to solve.
- work so that both employer and employees get what they want.
- demand that the other party agrees with their position.
- want the other party to make concessions while not making concessions themselves.
- treat conflict as a win-lose contest.
- overstate their position to get their way.
- are committed to the wellbeing of this organization.
- are proud to tell other people that they work for this organization.

To what extent do you believe that employee representatives are competent in?

1	2	3	4	5
Very low	Somewhat	Reasonable	Good	Excellent

Human Resources Management
 Establishing and maintaining relationships with management

Labor law
 Social skills
 Business and management
 Negotiation and conflict management
 Organizational change and business mergers
 Stress management
 Managing complex information (on strategy and change)

What is your opinion on characteristics and quality of agreements between management and employee representatives in your organization?

Traditional agreements	1	2	3	4	5	Innovative agreements
Inflexible agreements	1	2	3	4	5	Flexible agreements
Poor quality agreements	1	2	3	4	5	Quality agreements
Low commitment						High commitment
by management	1	2	3	4	5	by management
Low commitment						High Commitment
by employee						by employee
representatives	1	2	3	4	5	representatives

What is your opinion of how management and employee representatives manage conflicts in your organization?

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Sometimes	Regularly	Often	Always

In our organization management and employee representatives

- are effective in managing conflicts.
- are dealing with potential conflicts in a constructive way.
- maintain good personal relations while solving the conflict issues

Open questions:

1. Do unions renew to improve social dialogue? If so, how do they do that?
2. What changes are most important in your organization to improve social dialogue and relations between management and employee representatives?
3. Optional third open question in each partner country

If you want to be informed about the results of the study, please fill in your e-mail here:

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Thank you for your participation.